



“LET US COUNT THE WAYS”
SCRIPTURE: PSALM 139: 1-6, 13-18; LUKE 14: 25-33
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

September 4, 2016

The Rev. Dr. Marcia Mount Shoop, Pastor

Luke 14:25-33

14:25 Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them,

14:26 "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.

14:27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

14:28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?

14:29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him,

14:30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

14:31 Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand?

14:32 If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.

14:33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Counting the days until I would get home.

Every day, a new math equation in my head—23 minus 4 is 19. 19 days until I go home.

It is not that I didn't like where I was. It was that my heart was somewhere far from there.

I was in love—and home was where John was.

I had a year as a mission volunteer in New Mexico almost under my belt and a lot of unknown ahead in TN. But I was ready to be with him. Everything else could work out from there.

Over two decades later, I don't have enough fingers to count how many ways home has shape shifted.

Temporary places
Fleeting faces
Memories made
Memories fade

My sense of what could be, what would be sifting and shifting
Drifting from what I had dared to dream of before I knew better.

Building a life
Feeling the ground shift under my feet
Change the only sure thing

What is home in a world like that? Like this?

What are you willing to sacrifice for home? For a place to belong? A place to find purpose, to find your familiar? A way to feel like you are where you are supposed to be?

Today, millions of people wander and yearn, search and set their sites on a place where they can just be at home.

In fact, we live in a time when there have never been so many displaced people on our planet. The United Nations reports that 65.3 million people are in exile from their homes because of war or persecution or other dangerous situations. And half of them are children.

One out of every 113 people are displaced on our planet.

Those who are sleeping in shelters—over 500 in Asheville, over a half million in the US. And those who are not safe in their own homes—the abused, the neglected, those who have to hide who they are with the people who say they love them.

And we must remember, we must take account of those who lost their lives searching for home—stretching, pushing, soldiering on through deserts, turbulent ocean waters, crammed in the back of semi-trucks or on blow up rafts—where such risk held more promise than staying where they were, than staying in a place that would and could no longer be home.

Millions of people yearning for a place to call home. Millions of people homesick for the places where they learned to love, the places that taught them who they are. Or a place they have never known: a place that feels trust worthy.

Jesus is on a journey—not a walk in the park, not a trip to Disney Land.

“Do you have any idea what you are getting yourself into?” He asked the throngs who showed such enthusiasm for him on his way to Jerusalem.

Do they know where they are going? Do they know where he is taking them?

Or will they wake up one morning only to be caught counting the cost of this journey that had seemed like an exciting idea at the time?

What’s it worth to you to follow Jesus—this Jesus who is headed to Jerusalem, to conflict and betrayal, to truth-telling, to suffering and injustice, and to the miracle of resurrection in a turned-upside down world?

O Lord you have searched me and known me
You know when I sit down and when I rise up
you discern my thoughts from far away
You search out my path and my lying down...
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.

Let me count the ways you love me, O mysterious God of this multiverse.

You knit me together in my mother’s womb
My frame was not hidden from you
When I was being made in secret
Intricately woven in the depths of the earth

How weighty your thoughts are to me, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

God knows us, God occupies our lives—we are never-not confined, never not hemmed in by this Holy mysterious One

We can’t shake this vulnerability—we are forever God’s own.

A comfort. A chilling reality. A dangerous, delicate, Divine way of being called home to ourselves.

How often do we count our blessings? How often do we count the cost?

Jesus has this way of boiling things down and building things up—can we live in this dissonance, brothers and sisters? Exile is home. Loss is gain. Weakness is strength.

Follow Jesus and everything changes—follow Jesus and taste and see the world as it should be. Leave home to find where you have belonged all along.

Disentangle from the identity of family, from the normalcy of clan, of neighborhood, of heritage, of nation—and find yourself perfectly known.

Now this word “Hate” that Jesus uses is troubling. We understand “hate” as a destructive, harmful, annihilating orientation things. But the Semitic spirit of this term is emotionless. “Hate” here is not a passionate separation, but a detachment, a realization of priority.

Relationships with family are not severed, they are recalibrated. They are understood in their proper context—a Christ-centered universe where our love spills way past blood lines, where love flows freely into stranger and outcast, into discarded people, into the lost and alone—brother, sister, mother, father—seep into the truth of our deep connection with everything that is.

We are more than related. We are entangled with each other. Stitched together by the One who made us, the One who knows us, the One who calls us home.

Let us count the ways our Creator knits together home place for us, through us, in spite of us, because we are always, already hungry and thirsty for home.

Now this journey, this arduous, sometimes dangerous, this profound journey toward home can tempt us to quantify the experience using a metric of cost/benefit analysis—not a metric of provision, but a measuring stick defined by the things we fear losing the most.

But truly taking in the symmetry and fidelity of God’s providential care makes our eyes see the challenges of this journey differently—no longer a cost/benefit analysis. No these challenges are no longer costly, they are no longer diminishing returns. They are guideposts, signs in the stars, God’s very own mysterious and trustworthy GPS that guides us as we find our way home.

The poetics of this journey are nourishing, empowering in and of themselves, if we just take the time to notice them, to let them define the way we can be present to each moment at hand.

Hear the words of poet Marge Piercy from an excerpt of her “Spring Offensive of the Snail”

*Give me your hand.
Talk quietly to everyone you meet.
It is going on.
We are moving again
with our houses on our backs.
This time we have to remember
to sing and make soup...*

*But remember to bury
all old quarrels
behind the garage for compost.
Forgive who insulted you.
Forgive yourself for being wrong.
You will do it again
for nothing living
resembles a straight line,
certainly not this journey
to and fro, zigzagging
you there and me here
making our own road onward
as the snail does.*

*Yes, for some time we might contemplate
not the tiger, not the eagle or grizzly
but the snail who always remembers
that wherever you find yourself eating
is home, the center
where you must make your love,
and wherever you wake up
is here, the right place to be
where we start again.*

Brothers and Sisters, Christ is calling out to us to come from North and South, from East and West, from work, from rest, from crowded days, from lonely lives to a place where we don't have to hoard, or squander, or calibrate. There is enough. And the truth is here for us to acknowledge and heal—the truth of broken bodies, the truth of resurrected and redeemed bodies, the truth of enough, the truth of love that will not let us go.

*wherever we find ourselves eating
is home, the center
where we must make our love,
and wherever we wake up
is here, the right place to be
where we start again.*

Thanks be to God.