

# RIGHT AT HOME

Sermon, December 10, 2017

The Second Sunday of Advent

Texts: Isaiah 40:1-11, (Psalm 85) Mark 1:1-8, II Peter 3:8-15

I would like to re-read a verse from our Epistle lesson, this time from the Revised Standard Version: II Peter 3:13 -- *"But, in accordance with His promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home."* Peter writes about a day and a place where righteousness will be "at home" ... a place where the right and the good and the true is completely at home; not as a guest, nor as an occasional visitor, but as a permanent resident who is totally and fully and comfortably "at home." Can you think of anyplace in this world where righteousness is truly at home, where "right" is at home? Last week we talked about Camelot, that mythical place where right was at home, at least for a while, defended by the knights of the Round Table whose motto was, in part, *"Might for right. Right for right. Justice for all."* As I mentioned then, we really should use our Might to promote, defend, guard and protect what is Right ... to be hospitable to the right and the good. Then and only then can we ever be "right" at home, when right IS at home.

The sermon title is a bit of a play on words. We tell people, *"Make yourselves right at home."* Or, *"Be right at home."* Well, if you think about it, that can be a loving invitation and it can also be something of a bold challenge or stern admonition! In fact, it might even be part of a great Mission Statement for a church! We want to be about doing all we can with the help of God's grace and love and mercy and strength to *make things right* and good, starting with being "right" in our homes where we live. Yes, by God's grace and aid and leading, DO *"make yourselves RIGHT at home."* It certainly is easier to be right at home (*as in comfortable, secure*) when all is right at home (*as in good and true and right*). All is "right at home" when RIGHT IS at home in our homes and lives.

Is there a place where true goodness, authentic virtue, genuine compassion exists in abundance and as the norm, where it isn't mixed or tainted with impure motives, or where it does not have to be on constant guard lest it be taken advantage of? Is there anyplace in this world where true gentleness, kindness, and selflessness thrives, and doesn't have to live in danger of being crucified once again? What would it mean to live in a world where everyone acted justly and lovingly and kindly and considerately and lovingly with one another, and not because we were supposed to, but because it was our nature, our instinct, to do so? In short, a place where RIGHT is right at home? As Psalm 85 in our Call to Worship so wonderfully describes, a place *"... mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."*

Well, Peter promises such a world is coming. Using somewhat apocalyptic language, Peter tells us there will be a Day, "the Day of the Lord," when righteousness *will* be fully at home. He doesn't mean this so much as a threat, but as an encouragement! There is coming a day, Peter writes, when RIGHT will be right at home. Peter writes, *"[Knowing this] what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home."* In other words, Peter is saying, *"As you and I make every effort to live right, as we do the right thing, as we use our might for right, righteousness begins to find a home in us, AND this world becomes a little more like the world to come ... a little more like heaven ... and thus we hasten the arrival of that wonderful Day when righteousness will be fully at home."*

Who doesn't long to be right at home? That's a universal human instinct. Isaiah was speaking to Jewish exiles who longed to be right at home; in fact, the Old Testament history is that they weren't at home in the first place largely because of so many things they didn't do RIGHT at home when they were at home! God directed the prophet, *"Comfort, comfort my people."* *"Comfort My people, Isaiah, come and tell them their sin has been paid for, their hard service has been completed."* The voice of the prophet proclaims, *"Prepare the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God,"* intimating that He's coming to do what it takes to make them right at home again. He is using what would be familiar imagery to these exiles. In the days of the Babylonian empire, engineer soldiers known as "sappers" would precede the monarch as he traveled in his chariot. The herald would give the command, *"Prepare the way for the king,"* and these sappers would virtually construct the king's

road as he traveled through the wilderness. They leveled hills, built up ditches, filled in holes, removed dead wood ... whatever it took to make a highway to enable the royal chariot to make speed.

In today's Gospel, we are introduced to John the Baptist with the same words used by Isaiah the Prophet. As Mark describes it, John arrives on the scene preaching the need for repentance. The purpose of John's preaching is not so much to **indict**, as it is to **invite** ... his words may even be seen as a gracious invitation! In short, he tells those who will hear to do what it takes to make themselves RIGHT at home! But to make themselves RIGHT at home, they will need to repent. They will need to make their lives a place where RIGHT will BE at home. And to do that, they are going to need grace and help; they are going to need a Savior. As Mark and Luke relate to us (*Luke's account of John's arrival is found in Luke 3*), this message of the need for repentance apparently brought the crowds out. **Huge** crowds, we are told, came to listen to and be baptized by John. Why? Because I really do think people want to be *right* at home. Again, it is a universal human longing to be right at home, in all senses of that word "right." When things are NOT right in our homes, in our lives, then we have great difficulty feeling right at home.

We know we don't measure up to our own expectations, let alone God's. I don't have to remind you that your worst judge, the sharpest of all your critics, is that person who faces you every single morning ... in the bathroom mirror (*and you thought I was going to say "Your spouse."*). No matter how hard we try to make changes, no matter how many changes we've made, our reflected critic keeps looking back at us saying, "Not good enough." So it really isn't surprising that a great crowd gathered around John the Baptist. *"Preach it, brother John. We know we don't measure up. We know our ways have been crooked, we know we have valley sized gaps that need to be filled, we know we have mountainous difficulties that need to be leveled. We know the mistakes we have made. We ache that we've hurt the people we love most."* I don't know about you, but I have just about had my fill of those who tell us all our problems are someone else's fault, or the government's fault; voices who tell us we aren't so bad. We know what we have done! What we don't know is what we should *do* about it, how to go about doing what it takes to have that feeling and security and wholesomeness of being right at home.

Mark is not big on details, but he makes it clear that many people responded. Confessing their sins, owning up to their responsibilities, they repented. In the more detailed parallel account in Luke 3, they asked, *"What should we do?" "What should we do to make ourselves right at home?"* That is what they really wanted to know. In Luke's account, John simply replies with such things as, *"Whoever has two coats, should share with anyone who has none. Those who have food should share it with those who don't. Tax collectors should not cheat. Soldiers should not bully people. And be content with your wages."* These prescriptions are striking in their obvious simplicity. John is not telling these people things they did not know. He is not asking them to do anything heroic. He is simply telling them *to do the right thing as they have opportunity, beginning right now. (Which, come to think of it, simply doing the right thing is becoming increasingly heroic these days; but that's almost another sermon.)* To this list we could add other things that we know to be right, things we know we ought to do. *"Treat your spouse or your children with respect and love. Don't complain so much. Honor your commitments. Stop lying. Quit cheating."* John basically tells them to do what they know to be right, right now! To take simple, purposeful steps to "make yourselves right at home;" take steps to make the crooked straight. Doing the right thing isn't really all that complicated. But it CAN be hard.

More often than not, the problem isn't knowing what we ought to do. The problem isn't even wanting to do what we ought to do. The problem is actually carrying through and **DOING** it, taking the risk and making the effort. For various reasons what we know is the right thing to do may just be too daunting, too frightening, too intimidating; we think it's going to take more energy and resolve and effort than we think we can give. We need help. But we really don't discover we need help until we make the sincere effort to actually *do* what is right. We find we need help making the crooked straight. We need help smoothing out the rough edges of our lives. We need help filling the huge gaps of need. We need help raising our children, we need help setting a higher tone at the office, we need help honoring our commitments, we need help being right at home.

And the voice of the one crying in the wilderness says, *"That's RIGHT! Now you are ready for Christmas. Now you are ready for a Savior.* Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Come and help make us RIGHT at home, until that glorious day when righteousness will be at home forever and ever!