

Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shiitim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

John 15:1-11

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my word abides in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

Grasshopper on the Road by Arnold Lobel
Chapter 2: A New House

The road went up a steep hill. Grasshopper climbed to the top. He found a large apple lying on the ground. "I will have my lunch," said Grasshopper. He ate a big bite of the apple. "Look what you did!" said a worm, who lived in the apple. "You have made a hole in my roof!"

"It is not polite to eat a person's house," said the worm. "I am sorry," said Grasshopper. Just then the apple began to roll down the road on the other side of the hill. "Stop me! Catch me!" cried the worm. The apple was rolling faster and faster.

"Help, my head is bumping on the walls! My dishes are falling off the shelf!" cried the worm.

Grasshopper ran after the apple. "Everything is a mess in here!" cried the worm. "My bathtub is in the living room. My bed is in the kitchen!"

Grasshopper kept running down the hill. But he could not catch the apple. "I am getting dizzy," cried the worm. "My floor is on the ceiling! My attic is in the cellar!" The apple rolled and rolled. It rolled all the way down to the bottom of the hill.

The apple hit a tree. It smashed into a hundred pieces. "Too bad, worm," said Grasshopper. "Your house is gone."

The worm climbed up the side of the tree. "Oh, never mind," said the worm. "It was old, and it had a big bite in it anyway. This is a fine time for me to find a new house."

Grasshopper looked up into the tree. He saw that it was filled with apples. Grasshopper smiled, and he went on down the road.

Sermon

Where do you live? What is your address? Could you describe your house to me in a way that would make it clear if I was coming for a visit. Is this a new house or one that you have lived in your whole life? Is it a big house with many bedrooms and bathroom or a smaller house with just enough rooms? Does it have a lot of windows to let light in? Is there a special place that is just yours in your house? A place where feel most at home? Can you identify where all the pots and pans, dishes and glasses, silverware and canned goods are without even pulling open a cabinet door? Where do you live?

I grew up and lived out my childhood in one house. My parents built the house when they got married and still live in that house today. Since graduating from high school I have lived in five different apartments and three different houses. And each of these places has been home, at least for a while.

What makes your house a home? Is it the familiarity of the rooms and furniture, the quirks that are unique to the house or the little things you have done to make it your own - the paint jobs, wall repairs, or fixture replacements? These all go a long way in make a place into your space. But is that enough to make a place home?

I believe that home has little to do with size or space, the furniture or the address. I have sat and sipped drinks in large, multistory houses with room to entertain one hundred guests in common spaces throughout. I have sat in a tiny three room, mud-brick home, eating a simple meal of rice and lamb and beans with a dozen other works who had spent the week building this home for the proud new owner. So what makes both of these, and every other house in-between a home?

The first thing I think of is shelter. Every house I can think of has one thing in common - it is a shelter for those who live inside. A place of protection, that provides some level of increased comfort. Even a tin roof, dirt floor, small hut can protect from the direct heat of the sun and the winds and rains of the storms.

The second thing I think of is family - the people who you live with, the memories that have been made, the guests who have been invited in. There are many here today and many people in the world who live alone in a home. And yet, I would still content that what makes a place truly a home is the people who inhabit a space. This includes those who are living, now, in the present - children, parents, extended family, friends. It includes guests who come for a hour or a week, it includes neighbors who stop by to lend a hand or enjoy a picnic on the back patio. It also includes those whose memories continue to live inside that space. A home is a place where we are able to be comforted and a place where we are able to be taught, a place where we are loved and because of that love we are raised to do our best, to be our best.

Jesus often speaks about remaining or abiding. Another way of saying this is where is your home? Jesus says "Abide in me as I abide in you." Make a home in me and allow me to make a home in you.

If home is about shelter and comfort, then abiding in Jesus is just that, it is a place to find shelter and comfort. So often we turn to Jesus in the hardest of times when our anxiety is high and our troubles are more than we can bear alone. We find, in Jesus, a refuge, a hope, a courage to face whatever comes next.

But Jesus does not only invite us to abide in him, but for us to allow him to abide with us. This is where the second part of home comes in. That part where we find home in the place where we are nurtured, taught, raised up so that we can leave the house and contribute to the world. Think about what home is for children. A place they can be loved, a place where they can be taught and raised to be the best people they can be. To be good and kind and faithful and productive.

And the words of Micah fall upon us as God's words of encouragement for us to be the best people we can be. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

I hope you have a place in your life in which you can sense comfort and shelter, warm and love. I hope that that place is also a place that encourages you to be the best person you can be. I hope that in some way, White Lick Presbyterian might be a home for many of you in this way.

It is not always easy to be the best people we have been called to be. So often we seek out the comfort without the calling to do justice. We seek the shelter without loving kindness, we look to ourselves first and lose our humble walk with God. But that is why we come together in this home, to be comforted and renewed, forgiven and then sent out again, on the road as we walk humbly with our God.