

“Where’s Home?”

Psalm 23, Psalm 90:1-2, John 14:1-3

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“Lord, You have always been our home.”

(Psalm 90:1 TEV)

Over the past dozen years my wife, Jan, and I have been privileged to serve a number of churches during their Interim times. Along the way we’ve met many new and interesting people.

In an honest effort to get acquainted, people have asked me one question more than any other: “Where’s home?” In fact, we’ve just invited guests right here to do that – “Share your name and where you’re from.” It’s one of the best ways of discovering some common ground.

For many, this is an easy question to answer. You know, “If I could just get back to Bountiful, Alabama I’d be home!” I’ll bet if you were asked “Where’s Home?” you’d have a ready answer.

For me, however – a member of the vagabond generation – it’s never been quite that easy. I’m not trying to be cute. It’s just that I’m not always sure what the questioner hopes to learn.

Paul, Where’s Home?

Sometime when people ask “Where’s home?” they are hoping to discover where you were born.

My answer to this may be different, but unsatisfying. I was born in Kobe, Japan. Which only begs the follow-up question, “Why were you born there?” My best answer has always been, “That’s where my mother was!”

She was born in India, but grew up in Japan as a missionary child. After college she was

teaching music in Kobe when she met my father.

He had gone to Japan at the urging of his missionary brother who assured dad that teaching jobs were available in Japan as the Great Depression began.

“Well then, Paul, is Japan your home?”

Mercy no! I may have been born there, but I certainly would not feel ‘at home’ there.

“Then *Where’s Home*, Paul?”

For the first ten years of my life, I grew up in Miami where my father was a professor of Far Eastern history at the University. Miami was a wonderful place for a kid.

Sure it was hot and humid. Back then no one ever heard of a *house* being air conditioned. The only places to cool off were movie theaters and *Burdines*. But for me, there were always beaches and palm trees and blue sunlit skies. I was a ‘summer child’ – never even saw snow until I was ten.

“Well then, Paul, is that your home – Miami?”

Hardly! Today, I can’t even understand the language spoken by many folks living there!

“So, *Where’s Home*, Paul?”

We moved to Washington, DC during the Second World War. As an authority in Far Eastern affairs, my father was called into the war effort.

The Nation’s Capital was a great place to finish growing up. School field trips introduced me to all those Americana buildings and memorials we so regularly see in the background in our evening news programs.

“So, is that it? Is the Nation’s Capital your home, Paul?”

Well, frankly, no! Some catch ‘Potomac Fever’ – not I. Sure I know my way around our Nation’s capital, but I don’t feel ‘at home’ there.

“Then, *Where’s Home*, Paul?”

After college, Jan and I were off to seminary in New Jersey and then a year of graduate study in Scotland. We returned home to serve churches in Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia and then finally Florida.

Each of these communities had great personal appeal, together with professionally challenging opportunities and significant spiritual satisfactions.

“Are any of these *home* for you, Paul?”

Not really. Oh, we have grand memories of the places we’ve lived and the people we’ve served, but nothing even close to home-sickness.

“So, Paul, bottom-line it – Where *is* Home?”

Well by now, we’ve pretty much come to the end of our vagabond wanderings. When we married 59 years ago Jan told me, “There’s only one rule – *Warmer is better than colder!*” We both feel we’ve arrived at about the warmest and most comfortable place we can imagine.

“So, that’s it, *this* is home?”

Well, let’s not jump to conclusions quite yet.

Moses, Where’s Home?

A while back I was studying Psalm 90 – familiar to us because it’s read at almost every Funeral or Memorial Service. The first verse trips lightly off our tongues:

“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations”

I remember picking up the *Today’s English Version* – the so-called *Good News Bible* – and

flipping to Psalm 90. The first verse leaped off the page. It read,

*“Lord,
you have always been our home.”*

Somehow it had never dawned on my slow working brain that what earlier generations called a “*dwelling place*” we, today, call a “*home.*”

That’s when, for the first time in my memory, I noticed the title of this Psalm. You’ll remember that about 80% of the Psalms have a title like ‘A Psalm of David’ or ‘A Song of Ascents’ – that sort of thing. Psalm 90 bears this unique title:

*“A Prayer of Moses,
the Man of God”*

It’s the only Psalm in the entire Psalter attributed to Moses. You can see why as you read it. Many themes developed in Psalm 90 fit Moses’ life. So why don’t we ask Moses our question?

“How about that Moses, *Where’s Home* for you – Egypt?”

Ah, Egypt, Moses might have answered. In the land of the Pharaohs I was a royal prince. As a member of the monarchy I had every advantage a young man could possibly dream of. But I lost favor and got thrown out. No, Egypt is not my home.

“Okay, if it’s not Egypt, then *Where’s Home*, Moses – Jethro’s tent?”

Jethro, I can hear Moses say, now there was a man! I got my wife from among his lovely daughters. He had more common sense than ten men, and taught me priceless lessons I needed to learn about management and leadership skills. But Jethro’s tent – my home? Hardly!

“Okay, then *Where’s Home*, Moses – the Wilderness of Sinai?”

Sinai, Moses might reflect. I spent forty warm, weary, wandering years in that desert, trying to shape a rag-tag group of Hebrew slaves into a nation ruled by God’s laws and obedient to God’s justice. But is the Sinai Wilderness ‘my home?’ – not on your life!

“So *Where’s Home* Moses – the Promised Land?”

Never got there, Moses would admit. O, I came close. I climbed Mount Nebo and gazed west across the Jordan River. I saw the Promised Land, but I never set foot on its holy ground. My people went into the Land without me. No, the Promised Land is not my home.

“So Moses, where does that leave you? *Where’s Home?*” And Moses said, “*Lord, You have always been our home...*”

What Is Home?

‘Home’ is not about geography or architecture. It’s about people. This truth got reinforced early along in our little family.

The first house we ever owned burned on Christmas Day forty-eight years ago. Thankfully, we were not in it. We had taken off for a brief after-Christmas vacation in a place totally unknown to us – a little cottage at *Sun and Sea Rentals* on an island off the Florida coast called Longboat Key!

We got news of the fire from friends back in Virginia. As we drove home we tried to imagine the worst a fire could do. We didn’t come close!

On a cold and dreary December day – dirty slushy snow all around! – our little family trudged soberly through the charred remains of our home.

The congregation had arranged a rental house for us and filled it with borrowed furniture, linens and kitchenware, dishes and utensils. They even stocked the pantry with food!

But most touching of all – someone had pawed through the ashes, and uncovered all the toys our kids had been given for Christmas and replaced them!

We gathered in the front room of our little rented house, Jan and I and our two young children. Holding hands together I tried to say, we’ve lost a lot, but we haven’t lost what’s most important – each other!

That’s when our sense of home got deepened. Home is not about structures, neighborhoods or curb appeal. It’s not about geography or landscaping or design. Home is about people.

You want my real answer to “*Where’s Home*”? Home is where Jan is, where our family gathers, where memories are cherished and love is shared.

Paul Tournier, the renowned and beloved Christian Psychiatrist, wrote a thoughtful book about all this called *A Place for You*.

All of us have important ‘places’ in our lives – the tree fort you built in the back yard, that shady nook beside the lake where you proposed, a sacred spot you’ve set apart for prayer, a secluded natural sanctuary where you can be quiet and listen, your childhood church echoing with memories.

Tournier reflects on all these personal and often private places in our lives, each one crowded with memories. In the end, he explores Christ’s gracious promise “*to go and prepare a place for you*” (John 14:2).

Like A Child At Home

Believers know our ultimate “*place*” will be with Christ. Heaven is about ‘going home.’ Eternal life is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord.

During our life on earth we receive Eternal life through faith in Christ. During our life in heaven we experience eternal life unendingly with Christ

When at last we are eternally with Christ, we will understand Moses’ affirmation:

*“Lord, You have
always been our home”!*

All this became reinforced for me some years ago when I was the guest preacher in another church. Like you, I need someone else to lead me into worship. Music often serves this purpose in Services I’m leading.

On that occasion, Worship was almost over, but my personal sense of *worshiping* remained unsatisfied. The Offering at the end of the Service had been called for.

As the plates were being passed, the organist began playing. But who bothers to listen to the Offertory? *I do...and I did.*

She played an arrangement of a hymn I dearly love, *My Shepherd Will Supply My Need* based on the 23rd Psalm.

The spiritual genius of Isaac Watts came clear as he recast the almost too familiar language of this beloved Psalm. His fresh poetic insights are sung today to the haunting melody of an American folk tune. The organist played variations of this hymn.

Her music brought back to my mind the words of this hymn. As she – and *I!* – came to the final stanza, I realized the answer to the

question, “*Where’s Home?*” Here is how Psalm 23 ends:

*“Surely goodness and mercy
will follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell
in the house of the Lord forever.”*

Watts caught the emotional impact of these words and sketched in an unforgettable word-image what it means to be “*Home.*” Listen:

*“The sure provision of my God
attend me all my days;
O may Your House be my abode,
and all my work be praise.
There would I find a settled rest,
while others go and come;
No more a stranger, or a guest,
but like a child at home.”*