

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church & Neighborhood  
New York, New York  
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*Already Home!* Sermon Notes  
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From late spring until the beginning of fall, I share a small studio with a lady friend of mine on Fire Island. Toni Ann works during the week, and I work on weekends, so it makes it possible for me to get away on my days off to something of a retreat. For me that is often the beach.

This summer, I've been given a good deal of thought to my relationship with God. Through reflection, meditation, readings, and conversations...I've been really trying to better know – God.

I don't expect to understand my relationship with God, but I do believe that God understands God's relationship with me. It is a *home* place that I can always enter.

Some of the questions I've been thinking about include: How does God understand me? What does God know about me that I haven't figured out for myself? How is God trying to help? What does God know about me that I would like to keep from God (impossible as that is)? And, what does God know about me that I would really like to know for myself?

And, how does this all connect together?

Well, it's one of those questions that is too big to answer. But in there somewhere is the belief I have that God trusts and loves us. *And* that God has faith in us to continue the great hospitality of the ancients with the strangers that come our way, as well as with one another, growing together in relationships.

In some ways, it is the faith in the practice of hospitality in God's name – in spite of the sometime perils – that is the core, the *witness* of our relationship to God.

In the reading of Hebrews, this morning, this is iterated:

The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.

The act of faith. The relationship in action. This is not a singular act, nor is it an elitist divide. The witness and actions of our faith in this relationship is what gives others hope for another way – out of the “**madness and lostness we see all around us,**” as Buechner says.

But what to do when hospitality is not so easy to practice, when it is not received well – or when its opposite is imposed upon us?

Last night, I stopped in a local pizzeria to have a couple of slices of buffalo chicken pizza! Half way through my dinner a group of people that had been in a local pub came in, spread out, and took over the place with no regard for anyone sitting there. They were loud, shouted across tables, and had no concern about the language they were using and how it might be uncomfortable or offensive to others.

I found myself wondering what to do? Wondering what the guys behind the counter should do? Waiting to see if any of the other folk in the place would say anything.

Well, no one did and I decided not to say anything, either, finishing the pizza and leaving, feeling less welcome than I did when I first sat down looking forward to a quick meal.

Clearly, not every place practices the same hospitality. But the lesson was clear. We have the choice to make people welcome or not. And, it makes a difference.

In our Unison Prayer, Buechner reminds us that the *lostness* and the *madness* is not the last truth, but the next to last truth...

**Faith is the eye of the heart, and by faith we see deep down beneath the face of things – by faith we struggle against all odds to be able to see – that the world is God’s creation even so. It is God who made us and not we ourselves, made us out of God’s peace to live in peace, out of God’s light to dwell in light, out of God’s love to be above all things loved and loving. That is the last truth about the world.”**

Martin Buber, the German religious philosopher, suggests that the relationship with God is a longing for rightness that is greater than any one of us, but a part of each of us. So much so, in fact, that the *rightness* we seek can only be realized in human community – with one another. And there is “more” to all this....

We have been created with the “more” channel of God that takes a while to tune in. But once we find the channel and tune in our reception to the “last Truth” of Buber all sorts of things continue to happen.

The growing relationship we have with God “draws us in,” “moves us,” frequently *curves* our path from the direction we initially set out to follow, necessary because of our own sometime resistance. What we do is just remind ourselves and one another to be open to God in this way.

We may never get that message in the local pizzeria, because even though the language has been blurred, customer service is not the same as the hospitality of welcoming the stranger as the unknown angel in our midst. But we do have the ecclesia, the called out community of which we are apart – to be here to welcome those to know us and this amazing relationship with God into which we venture together.

It is that important. Finding one's self in their relationship with God, oneself, and others is at the core of everything. It really is.

Think of anything in your life. Think of your relationship with God. Think of your relationship with others. And, somewhere in that trinity of constructs you will find your present condition, conundrums, and promise.

This relationship of God and hospitality and how we practice and navigate it – is really our home. It's the home we have before any other and after any others have come and gone.

The writer of Hebrews says it for us:

**People who live this way [on faith] make it plain that they are looking for their true home. If they were homesick for the old country, they could have gone back any time they wanted. But they were after a far better country than that—heaven country.**

There are still many who are homesick for the “old country,” caught up in laments and the comfort and ease of selective memories of the past. They miss the relationship with God today and the call to hospitality. You hear the stories all the time.

“When I was...”

“Back then...”

“The way we used to...”

In chaplaincy, we call them “back then stories,” stories people tell about the past, sometimes living there, because they would rather not deal with the present. They get stuck, identifying home exclusively with a place or time, instead of as an active spiritual relationship with God, in whatever ways they may know God.

In many ways, it's a lot easier to do: “No change required” the sign might say. Stay as you were. Live as you were. Die as you were. Miss it all.

The Bible is all about moving forward on faith. It is the connection to others who have gone before. The motion and action of the writings is clearly based on the relationship of God with people and people with God.

I think I would be right in saying, for me, at least, that if I am not actively involved in changing, I am not in active relationship with God. And, that *changing* always has to be in movement toward others, extending the greater hospitality to all, less and less concerned about the response or the risk. And really, it's just about me allowing myself to be changed. Opening up the relationship, trusting God, and coming home.

Luke might as well of said of this relationship, “Keep it simple...” in today's reading.

Relax. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You will find your everyday concerns will be met. Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven – far from the robbers and the embezzlers. The place where your treasure is, is most where you will want to be.

The place where our treasure is – home – is in our relationship with God.

While I know that is true and while I continue to learn what that means, I am humbled and assured by knowing that God is in relationship with me, guiding the path, even when it curves.

And as Luke says, we are God's dearest friends, one and all.

Take that to the beach and relax.