

## **“Going Home”**

John 14:1-11

*Series: Cliff Notes on the Bible Jesus' Resurrection*

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

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Well, in addition to Easter it's the start of Baseball season. I love what George Carlin once said about the difference between Baseball and Football.

Baseball is played on a diamond, in a park. The baseball park!  
Football is played on a gridiron, in a stadium, the War Memorial Stadium.

In baseball you wear a cap.  
In football you wear a helmet.

Football is concerned with downs - what down is it?  
Baseball is concerned with ups - who's up?

In football you receive a penalty.  
In baseball you make an error – Whoops!

Football is played in any kind of weather: rain, snow, sleet, hail, fog...  
In baseball, if it rains, we don't go out to play.

Baseball has the seventh inning stretch.  
Football has the two-minute warning.

Baseball has no time limit: we don't know when it's gonna end - might have extra innings.  
Football is rigidly timed, and it will end even if we've got to go to sudden death.

And finally, the objectives of the two games are completely different:

In football the object is for the quarterback, also known as the field general, to be on target with his aerial assault, riddling the defense by hitting his receivers with deadly accuracy in spite of the blitz, even if he has to use shotgun. With short bullet passes and long bombs, he marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing this aerial assault with a sustained ground attack that punches holes in the wall of the enemy's defensive line.  
In baseball the object is to go home!

Home. Like “love,” “home” is one of the most beautiful words in the English language. My granddaughters love my daughter's Barbie House. They are so into playing house, they actually get *into* the house. They want to go home with Barbie. We long for home. After a long day in class, kids race home to hang out. After finishing their final exhausted college students hunger for Mom's home cooking. After a draining day of work, weary commuters can't wait to walk in their own front door. After standing in endless TSA lines, travelers long to pull into their own driveway. We love to go home.

That's because home is more than four walls, a roof, and a mailbox. Home is the voices and faces and embraces of your loved ones. Without them, a house is not a home. I remember well how empty I felt when I walked into my grandparents' house after they were gone. I felt it again after my parents passed away. Home had changed. It was not the same. Soon, the house would be someone else's home.

The object of baseball is to go home and be safe! But for many, home is not a safe place. We call our schools "the home team." But now every school must have security measures because of all the shootings. Houses of worship are not always safe. When members of Congregation Brothers of Israel synagogue came here to put on a Seder last month, Joan, one of their leaders, said to me, "You can't believe how lucky you are. You don't have to walk past a security guard to get into your building." Work, sometimes called the "home office," is not always a safe place because of conflicts and accidents. Hometowns are not what we remember. Bruce Springsteen once sang about towns across America filled with whitewashed windows on Main Street and closed factories. They say, "You can never go home." Maybe because it's not there anymore.

And closer to home, within the privacy of your four walls, there may be forces which are loosening the fabric of your family. Just the everyday duties of doing your job, paying bills, raising children and keeping love alive in your marriage can strain and break the ties that bind. Many families feel more fragile. Verbal, emotional, physical attacks are kept secret. Alcoholism poisons relationships. Caring for a loved one with a physical or mental illness is frustrating and exhausting. Affairs devastate marriages. No wonder they used to call it "a broken home." when someone walks out the door.

"Lord, where are you going?" Peter asks. In the middle of what's supposed to be a joyous Passover supper, Jesus tells his disciples He is leaving. "Where I am going," Jesus said, "You cannot follow now..." (John 13:36). That's why they left their homes – to follow Him. For three years, they walked by His side and watched Him perform wonders. Twelve seasons of homeless wandering. But it didn't matter. He was their home. And now He is going away. This news not only breaks their hearts, it breaks their home.

By three o'clock the next day, they know where He is going and why they can't go with Him. Their King was crucified as a criminal. His home is now in a tomb. Frightened and empty, the disciples hide behind a locked door. They are not just leaderless, they are homeless. What should they do now? Slink back to Galilee? Return to the ridicule of their hometown?

Then suddenly the news bursts through the door: "I have seen the Lord!" (John 20:18) Mary Magdalene cries between gasps of breath. "Jesus is alive! He's risen from the dead just as He promised!" They remember what He said Thursday night.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. Thomas said to him,

“Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:1-6

Jesus’s death removes the barrier of our sin, His resurrection opens the door to His Father’s house for us. Easter means we have a home. The Resurrection tells us this world is not our home. By faith in Jesus, we can one day go home to heaven, our Father’s house. When Thomas asks, ‘How do we get there?’ Jesus gives three simple answers.

First, He says, “I am the Way.” Jesus gives us **Access** to the Father. Notice Jesus does not give Thomas GPS directions. The world’s religions are full of rules and rituals – directions for how to make yourself acceptable to God and gain access to the afterlife. There’s even a website called Heaven’s Registry. For \$20 you receive “100 % guaranteed admission into heaven. Now there is no need for confessions or penance.” For only \$15 more you take a cherished pet with you.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus doesn’t give directions. He doesn’t say, “This is the way.” He says, “I am the Way. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me” (John 14:3). ‘I will give you access to my Father’s house.’ There is no direct route between earth and heaven. We can’t get there from here. Religious rules and directions don’t work. We need someone to take us home. Pastor Paul Borthwick was on a flight from Boston to Denver when two dark-suited men boarded followed by former President Gerald Ford. Paul thought, “I’ll go introduce myself.” As the secret service moved to stop him, Paul remembered talking with President Ford’s son Mike who also went to seminary. Boldly he called out, “President Ford, I know your son Mike. I just wanted to meet you.” President Ford told his men to let Paul pass and they had a pleasant conversation. Paul Borthwick gained access to the President through his son.<sup>2</sup> You can have access to our Father through His Son Jesus if He is your Way.

Second, Jesus says, “I am the Truth.” The Resurrection gives us true **Assurance** that God’s house will be our home. Actor Kevin Costner, known for baseball movies such as *Field of Dreams* and others, was asked if he believed in heaven. He replied, “I desperately want to! I mean, I really want to believe there’s more to me and to this life than just what’s here on Earth. Yes, I want to believe.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus didn’t just teach us a truth about God. He is the Truth about God. He is the True God. He said to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14:9,11). Those are bold claims. And they would be lies if Jesus did not rise from the dead. The Resurrection gives us assurance that Jesus is who He says He is and can do what He promises to do. He can take us to our Father’s house. Missionaries John and Betty Stam were arrested by the authorities. As they were led away to certain execution by their captors, a bystander asked, “Where are you

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Sands, Edmonton Sun (12-30-04).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Borthwick, “In Jesus’ Name, Amen,” Christian Reader (January/February 2001) p. 30-31.

<sup>3</sup> “An Interview with Kevin Costner and Tom Shadyac,” *Crosswalk.com*.

going?” “I don’t know where the guards are going,” John replied, “But we’re going to heaven.” You can have assurance if Jesus is your Truth.

Finally, Jesus says, “I am the Life.” His Resurrection gives us **Anticipation** for a full life here and a glorious, eternal life in heaven. Wonderful joys await us in our Heavenly Father’s house. I’m longing for the day when we don’t need security guards in schools or houses of worship, when bombs won’t rain down on anyone, when terrorism won’t even be in our vocabulary, when prejudice will be impossible, when hospitals are empty and graveyards are obsolete. I’m aching for the day when disease dies, when war wears away, corruption is out of fashion, refugees find a home, stomachs are never starving, depression disappears and you can’t feel afraid no matter how hard you try.

You don’t have to wait until you die and go home. Jesus wants you to start living heaven now. How? He wants to make His home in you. He says,

Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. John 14:23

How will the Father and Son make their home in you? Through the Holy Spirit. He says,

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:26-27

Starting next week, we’ll learn about the Unstoppable Power of the Holy Spirit. If you open the door and let the Spirit come home to you, you will receive a love that restores marriages and families, a joy that gives you strength in all circumstances, a peace that lasts even in the storm, a faith that drives out fear, a hope that death can’t overcome. I invite you to commit or recommit your life to Jesus, to open the door and let the Holy Spirit into the home of your heart. I invite you to join us in the coming weeks to learn about the unstoppable wildfire of the Holy Spirit through Sunday messages and Growth Groups. You’ll discover that with God there is no place like home.

It all started with a softball. Thirty years ago, when my daughter Kristin played softball, her coaches were a wonderful couple: Russell and Rita Bellmont. As I sat on the bleachers and got to know them, I learned their home is kitty-corner to Woodside, that three generations of Bellmont’s belonged to Woodside and that Russell went to Sunday School here. They were fantastic coaches who made the kids feel special. On May 18, 1996, they even gave my daughter the game ball. I invited them to come home to Woodside. They showed up a few times but then I didn’t see them.

I lost touch with them until about seven years ago when Russell’s mother Ruth passed away. They asked me to lead a memorial service for her. I again invited them to come back home to Woodside. This time, Rita returned in a big way. She not only started worshipping here, she became the leader of our Welcome Team. Now Rita is the one who welcomes everyone home to Woodside with a smiling face and a warm hug. She says,

When I walk through the door I feel God's presence here in the people. Everyone is my family. This church is always doing mission projects to help others. When people walk through the door, I like to greet them with a warm welcome. If they tell me they are looking around for a new church I tell them, "Well you can stop looking. This is your new home." And that's how I feel. When I come here, I'm coming home.

A little while ago, while cleaning out my garage, I found the game ball Rita awarded to Kristin. I showed it to Rita and Russell. They beamed with joy and asked if they could formally present it to my daughter the next time she visited Woodside. But then numerous health problems hit Russell. He fought each one bravely and refused to give up. I visited him in the hospital ICU. He gripped my hand with his vice-like grasp. I asked if he believed in Jesus as His Savior and knew the Lord was preparing a place for him in His Father's house. With tears in his eyes, Russell firmly stated his belief in the Lord. Then, before I left his room, he said, "I'm still going to be there at Woodside when we give that game ball to your daughter." Rita called me on the day before Thanksgiving. It was near the end. She held the phone to his ear so we could pray one last prayer.

It was hard for Rita to face Thanksgiving, Christmas and the New Year without her beloved husband and friend. But she knew where to turn. Her Woodside family embraced her with the same love and hugs she so freely gives to everyone else. With tears in her eyes she told me,

I could not face Russell's death without my church family. Without all of you, I would have sunk into deep depression. The people kept me going, they let me cry. I feel good knowing Russell is with the Lord. I know he was welcomed when he got there. He's not in pain. He's happy. I feel I am blessed by God.

Recently, Rita performed one of Russell's last wishes. She presented the game ball to my daughter Kristin. She felt Russell was by her side because he's watching from above. She's certain he is safe at home.