

September 1st: Home

My friends, today is the final Sunday in our summer sermon series titled “Displaced: Finding Home Together.” It has been quite a journey into our biblical text and into our personal circumstances, and I hope that these stories and themes have brought insight and wisdom into your daily lives. It’s been formative for me personally to dig deeper into these experiences of displacement and disorientation—I’ve come away from this series with an appreciation for the community that we’ve built here and the vision that we’ve cast together to be an inclusive home for spiritually curious people. I’m proud that we can dive into these deeper themes with curiosity and acknowledgement that all of us are at different places in our spiritual journeys—I love that our community makes space for these faith questions and encourages us to grow in ways that make sense for each of us.

If this topic is something that you’d like to continue to explore, we will be sharing all of the sermon resource sheets from this summer in our weekly newsletter—so you can go through and reflect on each passage as many times as you’d like. Both Pastor Heather and I have shared all of our sermon manuscripts on the Bremerton UMC website—so if you’d like to reread those meditations, they are always available to you.

Before I give a little bit more instruction about our time together, I invite you to pray with me and seek God’s presence.

Faithful God, we come into your holy space now with a desire to be touched by your peace and your grace. Fill our souls with the hope that we are longing for, encourage us when we feel lost or afraid. Fill this sanctuary with your presence so that we might feel the sacred home that you welcome each of us into. In this time of reflection, attune our hearts to your everlasting love, so that we might be empowered to love others in your name. Amen.

Well my fellow traveling companions, welcome to the end of the road. Not the end of all roads, but the end of this particular series. And now it is time for us

to close out this season of our life with intention—to take a few moments to pause and remind ourselves of what we have learned and what we want to take with us into the next phase of our journey.

So as you settle into your seat, I invite you to take a few deep breaths, center yourself, and identify your intention for this morning. Maybe it is simply to find a few minutes of rest, or maybe you're here to discover something new about yourself, or perhaps you're seeking a specific answer from God. Whatever that intention is, keep it in mind as we continue this time together. Allow it to direct your thoughts and be a guide for your emotions during our time of contemplation.

Our meditation this morning will happen in two parts—I'll introduce the first, and then Pastor Heather will lead us into the second. First, we'll enter into a time of personal reflection on the past few months, so that you can contemplate what you've learned or what has been impactful for you. After we've had some time to do those things, Pastor Heather will conclude our time with a spiritual practice of visualization—this will allow us some space to connect with God in our own ways.

As you came in this morning, there were reflection sheets on the table just inside the doorway, so if you didn't get a chance to grab one of those, you can do that now. This worksheet is designed to help you enter into this act of meditation and think more deeply about our summer themes as a whole—there is space to journal or take note of what God might be saying to you, as well as questions to ponder. I'm going to read those questions for us in case you don't have them in front of you.

Here they are:

What are you taking away from this series?

What topic has most resonated with you?

What spoke to you from these scripture passages?

And lastly, how will your faith be different because of this study on displacement?

If a worksheet would be distracting for you, or not your cup of tea, you are welcome to sit in silence and let the music wash over you. This time is yours to utilize as you wish.

In a few seconds, the music will begin to play, and it will last for about eight minutes. That should give us plenty of time to engage with these questions, or think about the week ahead. And then when the music concludes, Pastor Heather will invite you into the next phase of our time together. We hope that it will take all of these thoughts and emotions from these past few months and bring a sense of clarity and inspiration for your road ahead.

Let's begin.

music plays, reflection time

Pastor Heather begins

Psalms 89 is a communal lament that vividly expresses the bitterness of displacement and trauma, capturing the cries of people who have been conquered and crushed and exiled. It's full of anguished questions thrown at God: "O LORD, how long will this go on? Will you hide yourself forever? Where is your unfailing love that you promised?" The questions are never answered, but the very next psalm in the Bible, which is attributed to Moses, the prophet who led God's people through decades of wilderness wandering, begins this way: "Lord, through all the generations you have been our home! Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God." It's as if the editors of the book of Psalms placed these two psalms deliberately to take readers on a journey, reminding them that displacement and home are not opposites, and they're not mutually exclusive – there can be a both/and. We are invited to flourish in exile and find

home in the journey because God is our home, from beginning to end, and God journeys with us.

And as we wrap up our three-month journey through the landscape of displacement, I invite you to join me in a spiritual exercise, an inner journey of imagination from displacement to home. Over the next few minutes, I'll be talking us through this journey, as well as holding periods of silence. As I lead, I invite you to join in in whatever posture is most comfortable for you: to close your eyes or leave them open, to journal, to doodle, to simply sit. Kids at the back table, you're welcome to listen and join in, or to continue playing or work on the collage of what hope is to you. Please pray with me before we begin.

Our journey begins in the wilderness of displacement, where I invite you to identify one way in which you are displaced right now – one place in your life where you're in transition, or feel at sea, or unsettled, or in the wilderness. Maybe it has to do with a relationship, or a job, or a season of life, new physical surroundings, a particular situation. *(pause)*

As you imaginatively linger in that situation, what are the feelings that come to the surface for you? What are the questions you carry? I invite you to acknowledge them, and to honestly express them to God, no matter what they are. *(pause)*

And now, even as you acknowledge the displacement you're currently walking through, I invite you to think about what it would be like to be completely at home – completely safe and loved, in a place where you fully belong, where you can let down your guard and be yourself without fear. Perhaps you can remember when you've felt completely at home in the past, or perhaps you just need to imagine. What do you see? What are the sounds that you hear? Are there any particular smells that go along with this place of home for you? What do you feel – is the air warm or cool? Is there anyone with you? *(pause)*

Whatever you're imagining right now – whatever picture of home you are holding – I invite you to stop and linger there, to relax, to let the goodness and

mercy and love of God which are following you to overtake you and surround you, to be assured that no matter where you are or what you are going through, God welcomes you into this space of peace and belonging and safety and home, that God *is* the home that you long for, and God journeys with you. As you linger in God's love, hear these words from the Psalms again:

Lord, through all the generations you have been our home. Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God. (Ps. 90:1-2) Surely your goodness and unfailing love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." (Ps. 23:6)

And now, I invite you to go a step further, because God invites you not only to come home, but to *become* home: home to God's Spirit, and all that God's Spirit brings: love, joy, peace, belonging, patience, kindness, goodness, strength. God wants to make home in us. Think back to the displacement you identified, and imagine yourself walking through the wilderness of that displacement with God at home in you, with God's goodness and mercy and love and joy and peace and grace overflowing from you, transforming the landscape around you. As you hold that image, hear this promise from our reading this morning:

What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord... When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings. They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God. (Psalm 84:5-7). (*pause*)

For the final stage of our journey together, I invite you to look at the people around you, and imagine God bringing us all together to build a home, a tabernacle, a space of belonging and safety and beauty and transformation, where God dwells and there are no outsiders and all dividing walls are broken down, where we together participate in God's work of making everything new, on earth as it is in heaven. Take some time to picture this, and then receive this Scripture from the Message translation of Ephesians: (*pause*)

Christ brought us together through his death on the cross. The Cross got us to embrace... You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is

now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You *belong* here... God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

(Ephesians 1:16-22, The Message) *(pause)*

The word “Amen” means “let it be so”, so as we close this inner journey together, I invite you to join me in a hearty Amen, affirming the homemaking work God does in us and invites us into.

Amen.