

Going Home— You Know What To Expect

A Sermon on Revelation 22:1-5
Year C - Saints Triumphant
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JJ¹

GOING HOME. It may be harder for some of you to relate to this than for others. So many of you have most of your family right here in Door County. Maybe you've always lived here. Maybe when you didn't live here was many years ago when you went off to college. But to go home after a long time of being away is such a unique experience. And I'm not just talking about going on a long vacation and coming home and getting to sleep in your bed with your pillow, as nice as that is. But when you're away at school, in the armed services or live away, you really look forward to going home.

If you're anything like me, it wasn't going home for summer break, but Christmas that was the time you looked forward to the most. I remember driving home through the snow of Minnesota to go home during college. Last year we made the trek to Minnesota once again. Driving out there I realized that it had been two years since we'd been to my parents home—the home I spent half my childhood in. A lot had changed in the Twin Cities area, even around my parents house. More buildings. More houses. Bigger roads. More roads. But I still knew the way. There were even a few things

different at the house, but I knew what to expect.

That's one of the great joys of going home. **You Know What To Expect.** The sound of voices you heard since your mother's womb. The smells that instantly transport you decades into the past to simpler times. You see your loved ones and the rooms so filled with memories. Memories like why one of the front windows still has two cracks in it. One crack because a baseball you threw sailed high and the other because your sister forgot to unlock the window before attempting to open it. And then that the cracks are still there 15+ years later because Dad was too cheap to replace it because one pane was still good.

Then again, maybe looking back and going home wasn't such a good thing for you. Maybe your family was broken. Maybe there was abuse. Maybe there was always too much drama depending on who was there. Those things are terribly sad and not the way God has wanted it to be for you.

I also know that going home is very difficult for some of you because of loss. Some of you have to face that empty home every day. Some of you face that loss when you go home for the holidays.

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

You know my family is experiencing that for the first time this “holiday” season. I didn’t know last year that that was going to be my last Christmas with my Dad—even one of the last times I’d see him or hug him. Going home is different now.

Sometimes going home isn’t always the best, especially when someone is missing. But how wonderful, friends, that today is Saints Triumphant Sunday! Our fellow believers, now asleep in Christ, have had their heavenly homecoming! Today we are strengthened and encouraged by being shown our heavenly home where the Saints Triumphant already live. Today we are assured that when it comes to **GOING HOME—We Know What To Expect.**

We catch up with the Apostle John at the very end of his vision of the End Times and eternity. At the end of John’s vision of heaven, you could say that we are transported along with him into the New Eden, the heavenly Jerusalem. “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.”

In the Garden of Eden, the river flowed opposite of rivers today. Today rivers start as streams that gather into larger streams and small rivers to make great rivers like the Mississippi. But in the

Garden of Eden, the river flowed out from one spring to water the Garden. Now in the New Jerusalem, “the river of the water of life” flows directly “out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” This reminds us why this water of life gives us life. The source of our rescue from our sin, the power of the devil and even death and hell itself doesn’t come from us or any strength we have. It comes directly from our God who saved us through his Son, the Lamb, who poured out his blood for us and now sits victorious on his throne!



We’re also told that the “river of the water of life” is “as clear as crystal.” There is not one toxin or impurity in this river of the water of life. This water gives life and since sin is what brings death, this water of life is the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus, the Lamb, who gave himself for us, gives us a pure water of life, he gives us pure and full and free

forgiveness of all our sins. It is absolute and complete and when given to us by faith, leaves us perfect and blameless before God. In the waters of our baptisms connected to God’s powerful Word, this righteousness was wrapped around us already in this life and will forever be ours in heaven!

But that’s not all! “On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every

month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

In the New Eden, friends, we will once again have access to the tree of life! God had to banish Adam and Eve from the Garden specifically so that they wouldn't eat from the tree of life and live forever in their sin. But now in heaven, we won't be kept away. Why? Because Jesus overcame the ruin and destruction they brought on themselves and all things by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He did this through his sacrifice on the tree of the cross. Jesus has made everything new. Everything is right. Everything is as God has always intended it to be and it can not be undone in heaven. And to emphasize the certainty that life will be given us, John sees that this tree bears twelve crops of fruit year round. Not only is the tree of life the source of life, but abundant life. There's no chance of there not being enough for all God's people. There is life for all. And even the leaves have a purpose. The leaves “are for the healing of the nations.” All the diseases, afflictions and pains we suffer in this life because of sin are now completely removed.

The tree of life with it's life-giving fruit and healing leads right to the next thing John sees: “No longer will there be any curse.” Literally, “Every curse shall be no more.” Every consequence of sin is gone forever. Yes, friends, even the greatest

consequence of sin—death. The curse God warned would come on Adam and Eve if they disobeyed and which they brought on themselves and all mankind after them, is done away with. It cannot exist there because Jesus, the firstfruits from the dead, will make all his brothers and sisters follow him into the resurrection to eternal life.

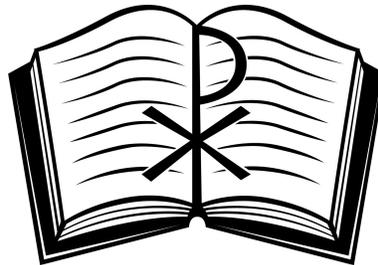
What's more is that there won't ever be the chance of us ever feeling as though God is far away, even though he is always with us by our side every moment in this life. In heaven, we will see with

our own eyes that God has made his dwelling with us. “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.”

And why would we serve and worship him? What motivation will we have?

John tells us a most wonderful thing: “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” As wonderful as it will be for us to see our loved ones' faces, the greatest joy is being able, at long last, to see God's face.

Maybe it's hard for you to see what's so great about that and why it will give so much joy. It's a completely understandable thought. We struggle to understand the joy this will bring, in part because we are still sinful people, but also because we haven't ever experienced it before. Now just think of how you long to see the smiling, loving face of those who are



now with Jesus. Consider the joy you will have in seeing them again. That joy pales in comparison to the joy of seeing God face to face!

We get a brief glimpse of the glory and joy of seeing God's face on the mount of transfiguration. You can imagine this was running through John's heart and mind as he wrote these words. "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Lk. 9:33). While John needed to leave that mountain the day he saw Jesus' glory, friends, we will never leave the glory of heaven. We shall forever see the face of the one who loved us and chose us as his own from eternity!

Then John mentions something else about faces—our faces. He says that "[God's] name will be on their foreheads." Do you remember our first lesson last week from Ezekiel? (Ezekiel 9:3-6) Ezekiel received a vision from the Lord about the coming destruction on Jerusalem, but also points to the destruction of the Last Day. While destruction fell on all those who rejected the Lord, before the destruction came those who believed received a mark on their foreheads, marking them as ones not to be destroyed but spared. Friends, that's you and me and all believers. The mark is the name of our God, the LORD. It marks us as his own forever!

Finally, John's vision of heaven comes to a close with these beautiful words: "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."

These last words emphasize the joy of seeing God's face. That God will give us light and look on us in his grace calls to mind the blessing God first gave to Aaron to speak over God's people and which we will hear at the end of worship today: "The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you." As the Lord looks at us and we at him, we will only have perfect joy, peace and satisfaction. Everything is right. Everything is as it should be for ever and ever.

Friends, this is the home all believers who have gone before us have entered. They have had their heavenly homecoming, and one day you shall too. One day you will go home and you can look forward to that day with absolute joy and eagerness because you know what to expect. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.