

April 1, 2018 – Isaiah 25:6-9, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Mark 16:1-8

Where is your home? What's your hometown? I've been asked that a lot in my life. Especially recently. As a fairly new resident of Boonville, lots of people want to know where I live and where I come from.

And I've lived quite a few places. I grew up in northeast Ohio. I went to college in northwest Ohio, and lived there for 4 years. I went to seminary in St Louis. Lived there for another four years. Then up to northern Michigan to my first call for 7 years. And now here, in Boonville, for the last year and half. I've had lots of homes.

But still, even after all this time, the place I really still consider my hometown is Brimfield, OH, outside of Akron. My family doesn't even live there anymore. But I lived there for 18 years. I've never lived anywhere else longer than I've lived in Brimfield. So, in a weird way, it still feels like home.

I know others have the same feeling. My wife has said that north county St Louis will always be home for her. She lived there even longer than I lived in Brimfield.

That doesn't mean that Boonville isn't also a very good and happy home for us too. But we've spent so much time in these other places that they're part of our identity now. We identify with the places we live. And the longer we live there, the more they become part of us.

We see that happening in our Gospel reading this morning. The women go to early in the morning to visit Jesus' tomb. For them, he was always Jesus of Nazareth. People identified Jesus as the prophet from the region of Galilee. He grew up there. Most of his ministry happened there. It was part of his identity.

But it isn't anymore. He is no longer Jesus of Nazareth for these women. In their minds, he will never be seen in Galilee ever again. He may have spent years and years and years in that region. But he'll spend even longer right here.

He is no longer Jesus of Nazareth. He is Jesus of the grave. Jesus of the tomb. He is not going anywhere anymore. He is dead. That is his home. That is his identity.

And then they arrive. And an angel speaks to them. *“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”*

Wait, what? He's not here? He's dead. How can a dead man be anywhere except exactly where we laid him? He's not Jesus of Nazareth anymore. He's Jesus of the grave. And yet, he's going before us back to Galilee? You're telling us that a dead man is going to beat us in a footrace. What is going on here?

It's no wonder they react like they did. Trembling. Astonished. Terrified. Their entire world has just been turned upside down. And it's not just because they have their friend and teacher back.

Everything has been turned upside down. The entire way the world works has been turned upside down. People who die stay dead. The grave is their home. Death is their identity. Nothing can change that.

And yet, here is an empty grave. And a messenger of God saying, “No. That's not the way the world works. The world works the way that God says it works. And if God says he has risen, then he has risen. If God says you have a final home somewhere other than the grave, then you have a final home somewhere other than the grave.”

And we do have that home. Isaiah describes it for us. A home where the Lord of hosts will prepare for us a feast of rich food and well-aged wine. A home where the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. A home where the reproach of sin that has burdened his people will be taken away. A home where death will be swallowed up forever.

Jesus shows us what that home looks like on Easter morning. It looks like an empty grave. It looks like the fulfillment of his promises. It looks like trembling and astonishment and, yes, even a bit of fear. Because it's a home unlike anything we've ever experienced.

And that's a little scary. Because our home is part of our identity. We live this life expecting to die. We live this life knowing that after everything is said and done, one day we will close our eyes and be carried to our final resting place.

And that shapes our identity. For some people, it drives them to pleasure and luxury. Seize the day. You only live once. Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die.

For others, it's the exact opposite. They cling to life with a death grip, so to speak. They do everything they can to be healthy and responsible. To make sure they live as long as they possibly can. And they leave an absolutely spotless legacy. Because the fear of death hangs over everything they do.

Most of us, I think, fall somewhere in between. But that doesn't mean our identity isn't shaped by death any less. I may be Joshua of Brimfield, Ohio today. But tomorrow, I may be Joshua of Walnut Grove Cemetery. And there's nothing I can do about that.

Because I know, deep down, that sin is part of my identity. Sin, that drives me to indulgence and luxury. Sin, that drives me to doubt and fear. Sin that drives everything I do. And the wages of sin is death. But what Jesus' resurrection tells me is that the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And that free gift changes me.

Just like it changed Paul. Paul writes in our Epistle about the resurrection. About how Jesus was crucified, died, buried, and raised on the third day. About how he appeared to Cephas – that is, to Peter – and to the twelve disciples, and to more than five hundred witnesses, and to James and the Apostles.

And then, finally, to Paul himself. And seeing Jesus changed him. *“By the grace of God, I am what I am,”* he says. Seeing the resurrected Lord changed Paul. Changed him from a persecutor of Christians. Changed him from a Pharisee of Pharisees. Changed him to someone who knew the grace of God.

Because of the resurrection Paul was a different person. Because of the resurrection, those women at the tomb were different people. Because of the resurrection, you and I are different.

We're different because the grave will not be our home forever. Death is not final. This life is temporary. Death is temporary. But, the resurrection is eternal. The resurrection is our home.

On that day, he will swallow up death forever. *“And it will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'*

That's what this life is all about. It's not about indulging in sinful luxury and pleasure. It's not about clinging to life in sinful fear and doubt. That's not our identity. This life is about waiting for the Lord's salvation. Waiting for that day when our tomb will be empty.

Our identity is the baptized children of God who wait for our faithful Lord. Baptized children in whom God has begun a good work. And in whom he will bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the day when all the angels will look in joy at your empty grave and my empty grave and say, “He has risen. Just as Jesus said he would.”

Where is my home? What is my hometown? My home is in paradise. My hometown is the New Jerusalem. I may not have set foot in either place yet. But I know I'll spend far longer there than I ever did in Brimfield, OH. I'll spend far longer there than I ever will in the grave.

That is where I will spend eternity. And that is where I will be at home with my Lord. Amen.