

Luke 4:14-22

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. ¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

In January 2000, leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina, invited Billy Graham to a lunch in his honor. Rev. Graham hesitated to accept because he struggles with Parkinson's disease. But the leaders said, "We don't expect a major address. Just come and let us honor you." So he agreed.

After wonderful things were said about him, Graham stepped to the rostrum: *"I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist honored by Time magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of each passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his other pocket. It wasn't there, so he looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat by him. He couldn't find it. The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.' Einstein nodded appreciatively.*

"The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket. The conductor rushed back. 'Dr. Einstein, don't worry,' he said. 'I know who you are. No problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.'

"Einstein said, 'Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going.'" Dr. Graham continued, "See the suit I'm wearing? I bought it for this luncheon and one more occasion. This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to immediately remember the suit I'm wearing. I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am, I also know where I'm going."

Billy Graham was talking about the "ultimate" in homecoming. Today, I don't necessarily want to explore homecoming from that aspect, in terms of life on earth coming to a physical end. I want to talk about what it means to be "home", right here on this good earth.

Have you ever reflected on this question: Where is home for you? Not your physical address, but what makes it home? Is it familiar landscape, a quality of life, the presence of particular people? Can there be a homecoming even if you have never been there before? I believe the answer is YES! For the home we ultimately seek is found in relationship with God. When Augustine says, *"Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee, O Lord."* He means that our natural home is in God.

Homecoming is about returning to the source. The source of love, nurture, acceptance, warmth. We come home to learn more about ourselves; to restore and reenergize the spirit; we come home to heal. Many churches can be a place many people call home. I imagine many of you would say this church provides a sense of "home" for you. Some people have shared that when they come into this sanctuary, they sometimes find themselves teary, or feel a deep sense of home here. This church, this sanctuary is a legacy to our faith, and to the future. It was built, not just for the people who came before us, and not just for us, but for all the people who will come and experience a connection with the holy and the sacred. Through God's grace, you are the ones who have created this spiritual home. We ask God to sustain it, to keep it vibrant & viable for this family of faith now, and for those to come.

Robert Frost said that *“Home is the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in.”* And remember the catch phrase from “Cheers”? A place where, *“Everybody knows your name.”* Sometimes you want to go
*Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came; You want to be where you can see,
Our troubles are all the same; You want to be where everybody knows your name.*

Part of making this a place where everybody knows your name, is actually wearing your name tag, so people can call you by name. We all ache for a community that will take us in, with all our quirks – and yet celebrate when they see us coming! That vision of homecoming that underlies our deepest spiritual yearnings is also what we are called on to offer one another: create a place where people feel a sense of acceptance and belonging. There's a song by the Wyrld Sisters, entitled, *Leave a little Light*

*When we're homesick it's not for places So much as the faces of the people that we know
And the road that we take is built on a landscape Of each of our loving souls
So when we lose a star dies, the earth cries At darker skies, our world is changed
And the road that we take is built on a landscape Of all that's re-arranged
Leave a little light in the window, I might be home Leave a little light by the back door, too.*

As I think about the vision of what home means, a word comes to mind. The Hebrew word, Shalom. It's kind of like the greeting “Aloha!” A greeting and also a farewell, but means much more than that. IT has usually been translated into English as “Peace.” Webster defines peace as a state of tranquility, freedom from civil disturbances and harmony in personal relations. But the meaning of shalom goes far beyond the narrow definition of the dictionary. It also means to be complete, perfect and full. A sense of wholeness, health safety, prosperity, and rest. Saying shalom is a pledge to live for the other's well-being, a covenant to seek the good life of God's favor together.

So peace, as translated from the biblical shalom, is not merely an absence of disturbances but an active pursuit of the well-being of others. It finds its expression in a sharing and caring community. Shalom is a healing balm of unity that overcomes divisions, the loneliness and the brokenness that are so much a part of our world today. I believe we in this church have a special ministry of shalom, a healing balm of wholeness and peace that can help people find a sense of home. What does that mean? For one thing it means that we have our work cut out for us. It means that our church is not called to be a rest home or a retirement center; it's called to be a rehabilitation center – did you catch that – a place of healing and wholeness, a place where we learn to exercise our faith in order for our hearts to grow strong, empowering us to reach out in ministry.

It's natural that a ministry of shalom begins in the church, with the people who are here now. Jesus began his ministry in the temple, the church, and those who were gathered heard him gladly, because he spoke to their own brokenness and broken condition of the word, but he didn't leave it at that. He offered them hope, and he offered them a challenge. It's tempting to stay in the church where it's comfortable. But Jesus calls us to do more. It's not enough for us to celebrate a private shalom in the privacy of our own home/church. We must share it. It's not enough to hear a sermon, and it's not enough to go to church. There is so much brokenness in the world, and there are so many people who desperately need the healing touch of shalom that this church has to offer.

In this morning's gospel reading, we hear the story of how Jesus had his own homecoming – announcing good news. A world where the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, and where all have access to clean water and adequate sanitation, basic health care, and the promise of development that does not endanger the rest of creation. That vision of abundant life is achievable, but only with the passionate commitment of each of us. It's God's vision for homecoming for all humanity. The ability of any of us to enjoy shalom depends on the health of our neighbors. None of us can be fully at home, at rest, enjoying shalom, unless all the world is well, and have an opportunity for health or wholeness. It is a hope that has Jesus audaciously saying, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled.”

The homecoming of shalom is both destination and journey. The challenge is before us. How is God empowering you to share the gift of shalom? Who are you going to reach out to? God has spoken to us – through the prophets, through the mystics, through Jesus, and through our baptism. All are welcome, all are

fed, all are satisfied, all are healed of the wounds and brokenness . May this new year of gathering be filled with all we bring to it: Welcome home. Blessed be, Shalom chaverim, shalom, my friends. Amen.