

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN NEED TRAVELING SHOES

Where We're Going

Psalm 90:1-2, 16-17 and Revelation 21:1-5

May 11, 2025

A story of home. Until I was in fourth grade, our family of six lived in the town of Woodleaf, North Carolina, population 898. My father was the pastor of Unity Presbyterian Church, and we lived in a manse (that's a home owned by the church) less than two hundred yards from the sanctuary. Now, to be the pastor's kid in Woodleaf meant to be known—and known *about*—by the whole town.

The story begins in that manse. It was Friday morning, and Dad was writing his sermon (I can still hear the typewriter keystrokes). And I, four years old, was playing somewhere nearby. Dad was focused, and I was bored. So, I decided to set off for Uncle Sam and Aunt Gloria's house. Sam and Gloria Correll were chosen family, dairy farmers, and church members who lived closest to us, only about a quarter mile from the manse, and even closer if I took the shortcut through the pasture, which I did. Dad was busy, so I didn't see the need to mention my plan to him. I simply set out on my journey like only a four-year-old could, confident, curious, and blissfully unaware of any risk before me.

I slipped under the fence and into the pasture. I walked past cows I barely even noticed, and back under the fence on the other side, and finally into the Corrells' home through the carport door. A triumphant entry. I can't remember what I said, but I do remember how it felt when Uncle Sam scooped me up— his arms around me, the smell of the farm on his clothes, his laughter, which was half-relief and half-rebuke. I remember it because I felt secure. I felt safe. I felt at home. Only later did I learn the reason for his reaction. It turns out that this happened to be the day the Corrells had put the bull out in the pasture, the very pasture I had ambled through, for his regular visit.

I had no idea I had walked through danger. All I knew: that I was welcomed, like a child, *at home*.

Time and again, Christian theology declares that God chose to take on flesh. The heart of our faith is the truth that God made a home in this world. And because of this, all our ordinary places are touched by holiness. As the Kentucky farmer and poet Wendell Berry has written, "There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places." Yes, the world that is our home belongs to God. It is sacred. It's up to us to honor, ignore, or defile this.

The Psalmist takes it a step further. "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations." I remember when our son Benjamin was four years old. I was reading to him a book about a dog who meows and quacks, oinks and moos. Concerned, his loving and dutiful mother takes the dog to the vet, who quickly discovers that there is a cat, a duck, a pig, and a cow living inside of him. So, amused, I asked Ben, "Do you think we might be living inside a dog?" He looked up at me, confused by the question, and then replied with a four-year-old's certainty, "No, Dad. I already know we live in God!"

The witness of scripture confirms what Ben already knew: God is our home.

Which places, for you, radiate with the presence of God? As you consider the experiences where God felt closest, which memories rise to the surface? I recall mountain vistas where I've been overcome with awe, soaring chapels where I've been met with grace, the sanctuaries where I've made my vows and my life has been changed. I imagine that each of you could name places where God feels especially near. There is something in each of us that longs to feel at home, something that attaches our experience of God to particular places, specific locations, where God's presence is tangible for us.

It is not that God is any more present in those places. God is indeed everywhere, our dwelling place in all generations and every place. But we humans have always needed spaces and times set aside to reorient us to God's constant presence. It's why Jacob built a pillar at Bethel. Why Moses set up a tabernacle. Why Jesus worshiped every week in the synagogue. Why Mary went to the tomb. Why Paul planted churches. Why Prisca and Aquila opened their home to host one. And it is the promise at the heart of Revelation's vision: "See the home of God is among mortals."

God is our home. And our home is with God.

As we travel the road of faith, we need regular reminders of this truth. We need time and space set apart to be at home with God—to remember where we've been, to recall who we are, to consider where we are going and why it matters. I remember a couple, in the waning days of the pandemic, who had returned to in-person worship after many months streaming at home. They joked with me about how they'd grown a little too fond of worshiping in their pajamas with a cup of coffee in hand. (Both of which are totally fine with me in the sanctuary, by the way.) They described them as perks of online worship. But they went on to say how eager they were to be back in this space and how overwhelmed they were when they walked in for the first time. When I asked why, they said, "Simple. We can't multitask in the sanctuary." So much of our lives is spent juggling too many things at the same time and not doing any of them very well. But here, perhaps uniquely in our lives, here we do one thing: we come to encounter God.

As our lives are increasingly untethered from our bodies—scrolling, streaming, swiping, isolating—this place calls us to be fully present, body and soul, heart and mind. Every week, in this space, we reclaim the sacred power of embodied faith. Whenever we lift our voices in unison or extend our hands in care. In this space, presence—your presence—matters.

And what we do here matters as well. That's why we keep returning. Here we baptize our babies. Here we make confirmation promises and wedding vows. Here we sing with joy and listen as angelic voices proclaim God's glory.

Here we break the bread of life and drink from the cup of salvation. Here we proclaim resurrection hope and light the candles of Christmas peace.

Here, we invite children to learn the stories of faith. Here, we honor our saints and grieve our losses. Holiness happens in this room—not because the space is magical, but because we have set it apart. Here we speak sacred words we speak nowhere else. "Till death do us part." "Child of the covenant." "Glorious company of the saints in light." "The body of Christ broken for you." "Help me see what you see and love the way you love." *This* is the room where we are nourished for the journey. Where we rehearse our final homecoming.

The final chapters of Revelation offer a dramatic vision of how all our journeys will one day end. We often imagine the end of the story as escape, our souls raptured from this weary world. *One fine morning, I'll fly away.*

But Revelation tells a different story. The elevators are not going up; they're coming down. The holy city descends. Heaven meets earth. The home of God is among mortals. We are not escaping this world; God is redeeming it. We are going home, but home is here.

God is our home. And God's home is with us.

This morning, we have the joy of welcoming a new class of confirmands into membership of our congregation. For many months now, these teenagers have been preparing to make their profession of faith and be received by you, their church. They have been on a journey of spiritual growth and discovery together. And the end of this journey is to return to the place they started and be at home.

Of course, for our confirmands, this day does not mark a completion but the next step on a lifelong pilgrimage. To feel at home in God is not to rest, but to rise. To be sent. To carry that sense of home with us as we venture forward. And, friends, we too are a part of that call and responsibility. This community must be not only a refuge but a launch pad for ministries of love, and compassion, and justice.

We are not where we once were. We have not yet arrived at our destination. We are on the way. And today, as these confirmands take their place among us, they are not settling in. They're lacing up their traveling shoes.

And so, to you, our confirmands, our fellow travelers:

May you know, this day and every day, the God who walks alongside you, faithful, steadfast, unafraid. May you travel light, but never alone. May the voices of this community echo in your heart, reminding you where you come from and to whom you belong. And when you lose your way—and you will lose your way—may the grace you claim today be the light that guides you home.

Friends, our journey is not complete. We are still traveling, walking each other toward a destination we cannot always see. So, keep going. Walk with courageous faith. Trust the God who makes a home among us, who waits at the door to welcome you—a wandering child, swept up in the arms of grace.

Not a stranger. Not a guest. But a child at home.

ⁱ From "How to Be a Poet" by Wendell Berry