

Coming Home

*The word of the Lord came to me saying,
"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,
and before you were born, I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

This Sunday we will start traveling in the company of one of my "favorite" prophets, Jeremiah. And Jeremiah reminds me of how I never ceased to be amazed at God's ability to startle us with new and wonderful invitations into new ways to be God's people.

A life with God is indeed a pilgrim's journey, and I am pretty sure that many of us gathered here today could testify that when we travel with God, the trip is seldom boring.

And another thing that I find so astounding is that in every new journey we take with God, we find that what lies at the end of the road is always home. God, it seems, is always, always calling us home---even if "home" is a place we've never been to before.

Later in Jeremiah we hear him say:

"He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.' For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the heights of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord...then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their weeping into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow."

We all carry a longing for home. The interesting thing is that often in this modern world in which we live, we sometimes find ourselves longing for home even though we've never left the place in which we have lived for some time. But I think God's people are often most inspired and enlivened when we are taken out of our comfort zones and cast into a new way of being.

As we approach our three-year anniversary together, I can see that we are at a place where we desire to be a community that seeks to pull together and live in God's exuberant joy.

These are times that might rightly make us question our core beliefs. I think it can be difficult when we sometimes rightly just want to get on with life, worship on Sundays and enjoy our lives, when suddenly we find ourselves in potentially threatening and unfamiliar territory.

The world wants to tell us that these are precisely the times when we should close up, self-protect, and just look out for ourselves. But you bear witness to what it means to be God's people—you are a faithful remnant that want to keep the course.

We have been traveling with God and we are emerging in a new place, as a new people, ready for new experiences.

You are proof that it is precisely in those times when we fear we are at our weakest that we are in fact most open to receiving God's transformative and life-giving love. We are in times like these most willing to welcome new and interesting ways of being a community of faith.

I once had a feeling of homesickness that felt unusual to me, it didn't quite feel like grief that often comes with homesickness. And then I realized I was actually feeling homesick for something that had not happened yet, but would happen in the future—I was in a new situation and I realized my longing wasn't for a particular place, but for a time in the future when the chaos of transition was behind me and my new life had become more routine. I was longing for the same familiarity with the new that I had held with the old!

But then I also realized that wanting the new to become just like the old is not the substance of the journey to which God calls us. When God does something new God *really* goes for the gusto and we are called in many ways to do the same!

How could the world ever have anticipated Jesus? Who would have ever believed that God's greatest power would be made manifest in vulnerable surrender to death on the cross?

God is full of surprises and God is always moving out ahead of us and calling us to become more than we ever dreamed or imagined we could be. God takes the best of who we have been and makes it better. God transforms our broken places and turns our mourning into joy.

I give thanks to be a pilgrim, a pilgrim traveling with a people of faith, in the company of our surprising and wonderful God. We *are* all being called home; home to a place we have never been before.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+