

## **“A Reflection on Home”**

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We all have an idea of what home is. Where it is; What it looks like; Who's there; What it feels like...I want you think about something, please close your eyes.

God says to you, *“My child, my friend, my comrade. You are special. You are treasured. You are loved. Live in peace and this land will take care of you. You cannot own it for it is not yours to own. It is ours, together with your brothers and sisters, all of the creatures big and small, it is ours. The land will shelter you, she will feed you, she will provide for you. Work together and you shall not only sustain, but develop and move together until the end of time.”*

Now think for a moment: What does this mean for your home? How does this change or enhance your vision of home? How does it make you feel?

We are entering this Sunday right into the midst of an ongoing conversation between Moses and God. The first time I read this scripture, I heard it as a frustrated argument between God and Moses, both frustrated with each other and with the people. This reading from Exodus 33 follows (both in the Bible and in the lectionary) the story of the Golden Calf and can be understood fully only in light of that story, and of the larger story of Exodus.

After bringing the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, God initiates a special relationship with them, calling them from all the peoples of the earth to be God's “holy nation” (Exodus 19:4-6). God entrusts them with the land. God had given them the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), and instructions on building the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31).

God had even promised to dwell in the midst of the Israelites; and the tabernacle was to be a visible sign of that abiding presence of God (Exodus 25:8; 29:45-46). Just as God's glory rested on the mountain in a cloud, so would God's glory fill the tabernacle (Exodus 24:16; 40:34-35). God would be present with the people in a real and material way as they traveled through the wilderness. The problem, of course, is that by the time we get to Exodus 33, the people are confused and frustrated. They begin worshiping the Golden Calf, God feels betrayed. And now Moses is having a conversation with him. He says to God, “Look, I know you think I'm special and you've chosen me to do this, but how am I supposed to do this? How do I know I'm doing the right thing? Who's gonna do it with me? Give me something to know I'm doing it right.” And the way God responds to Moses is by saying, “I know you by name.” I know you. You *are* special to me. I am here. And although Moses can't know or comprehend God completely; he cant even see God fully - he trusts.

Such is the path we travel. Sometimes its hard to know whats up from down, whats wrong from right, what we're supposed to do. But, we must keep moving forward with the grace and love that God guides us with, simultaneously grounded in the spirit that connects us far beyond our comprehension.

I've had the privilege and opportunity to participate in pastoral and solidarity visits to the Philippines and Palestine through the PSTF and the FOWF partnerships. In a very personal way, an initial longing to go had to do with my longing to find home. Since both my maternal and paternal grandparents left Palestine and the Philippines as young people, I wanted to know the land that they left. I wanted to know the people, I wanted to hear the music. I wanted to taste the food, and visit family. Unfortunately, the homes my grandparents left had new families in them.

Something I've often felt is: Where is my home then? I'm treated differently because I'm a woman; I'm a queer woman; I'm mixed race; I'm Arab; and I'm Asian. My grandparents all came to this country to seek a life better than the one they had “back at home.” So, if the U.S. is my home now, who are my people? Where do I belong?

One thing my people all have in common are the stories of people being forced out of their homes. Both figuratively and literally. Many people are forcibly displaced from their villages, entire towns massacred, and land stolen from right beneath their feet. My people are subject to militarization of the mind, land, and identity. These play major roles in the ways in which society

functions, many are more accustomed to see military vehicles than they are to seeing teachers, and doctors and human rights defenders.

For a country like the Philippines, an agriculture country who has the ability to produce more than enough resources to feed and sustain its people, it's hard to believe that over 76% of the population live in extreme poverty. Because of the extreme richness of the land, the people and the land are exploited and destroyed. Worldwide are struggling for their right to live, for the right to home. But, we all know its not just abroad. It happens right here in our own churches. We keep people out of our churches, our communities, our homes.

So, as a people who recognize injustice, now what is *our* duty?

Do we have a duty? Now that we have faced it, what is our role? Do we have a role? Do we have a responsibility? I think the answer is yes. The answer has always been yes. This church, under many people in leadership taking positions, has not only addressed, but committed to justice work. Do you know *why*? Because our church, our community, our home does not stop at that door.

This is not an us versus them scenario. We all face injustice, some more others. While we have the responsibility to face injustice, we also must realize that each of our individual liberation is tied to the liberation of those who experience injustice at its worst. **Each of our liberation is tied to the liberation of those who experience injustice at its worst.** If our world, our community, our home is threatened, we must all respond.

The church, which has provided sanctuary, been a spiritual home, created community and been a source of God's love for many - has also been a source of pain and suffering, used as a tool for colonization, used as a tool to keep people away. But, what we should keep in mind is that the bible is a book put together by humans. The church is a human concept. There is no doubt holiness is in either. But they are holy because we are made holy. They are not perfect, just as we are not perfect. They are flawed because we are flawed. Think of Palestine, for example. A land that has been tortured and ravaged by war, the degradation of life, the destruction of anything that is holy - a land we call the holy land. This is an attack on all of humanity. The world should be devastated that *again* we are witness to extreme evil. The true holy does not *only* reside in Palestine. The land that we have been entrusted to, our home is the true holy land, because the love of God lies within each of us and connects us beyond our comprehension.

I know sometimes we are afraid of politics, we are afraid to bring the political discussion into our church. But, there is no separation. We cannot check politics at the door as if our faith is not informed by all that is around us. We cannot avoid the connections. And we shouldn't. As it is stated in a theological articulation of the three ministries of C&S, "structures of power and economic, political forces in society are, in the final analysis, subject to Christ's will." Our motivation is not only political, but a commitment to the gospel. The gospel tells us to be ethical and humane. The gospel calls us to work for justice for life, with an ethical perspective. There is a particular responsibility that people of faith have to justice movements, and they include the organizing and mobilizing of the masses to participate in justice work for peace.

Slavoj Zizek, a philosopher and theologian from Slovenia, raises the idea of what it means for human beings to live here on earth, this planet which we call home. He claims that Christians are not fully living in this realm on earth because we are not fully in touch with because of our notions of heaven. Zizek's portrayal of human experience teaches us that while there is life after this life on earth, our existence here is to embody the God of justice, the holy spirit, of whom will work through the basic masses for change. But, to receive the gift of heaven is not an achievement, but rather a transformation of physical presence on earth to spiritual presence in heaven. Furthermore, it is not our duty to work to get into heaven, because it is merely a transfer of energies. In fact, our purpose, really, in this earthly realm is to interact more closely with those who work for the righteousness of heaven, here on earth. We have been entrusted this earth because it will sustain us, it will provide for us, it move us forward. We are entrusted to be the presence of God experienced in creation. We are called to create

wholeness. Just as Moses went to God frustrated, we too stand before God, often pleading for the answer. Where do we go? What do I do? Who will do it with me? Please tell me I'm doing this right.

The truth is, we have to reconcile with God. We have to reconcile with mother nature. We have to reconcile with our brothers and sisters. Archbishop Oscar Romero said, "Peace is a product of justice. But justice is not enough. Love is necessary. The love that makes us feel that we are brothers and sisters is what properly makes for true peace."

Just last week, I was at vigil in San Francisco's Union Square to acknowledge the life and death of Jennifer Laude. Jennifer was a transgender woman who was brutally beaten to death by U.S. Marine, Joseph Pemberton. He could not reconcile her sexual identity, and after realizing that she was a trans-person, brutally murdered her. Her death is not only a direct impact of U.S. military presence in the Philippines but her brutal murder further exposes the daily vulnerability of trans-women who regularly suffer systemic violence and hate crimes. Trans-women like Jennifer are at a higher risk for violence because we live in a system that de-legitimizes their lives. Although there is an increase in violence towards trans-people worldwide little is ever done to protect their lives and to hold the perpetrators accountable.

I hear this story, and I think of some of my closest friends. Even friends and family who aren't transgender, but present themselves and/or identify as gender non-conforming. They don't look like a stereotypical "man" or "woman." They're called names, called confused, called freaks, kicked out of bathrooms, kicked out of buildings, kicked out of their homes. I think of friends and family who look like you, look like me and are called names, called freaks, kicked out of their homes.

Who are we, if not a people that believe in the love of God? Who are we, if not a people that have faith in the reality of the beloved community?

There is often a tendency for marginalized communities to claim space, to transform space in order to live more fully and write our own narrative - a narrative that speaks truthfully about the experience, history, and future of our communities. So, what if we all took seriously the notion of connectivity? We're not just connected because we live on earth. We have to sometimes be reminded that we do not own the earth. We don't own the land. We have been entrusted to this earth because it will sustain us, it will provide for us, it move us forward. This is our home, and we are entrusted to be the presence of God experienced in creation and we are called to create wholeness in our home.