

AT HOME WITH WHAT IS

Sermon by Rev. Ron Farr

Based on John 14:15-23
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A good number of years ago when Patty and I were serving a church in the Boston area, we had a good friend named Phyllis Cook. She had been a preschool teacher, was a grandmother, and took an immediate liking to our preschool daughter, Rachel, who today is 26 years old and in graduate school. Phyllis invited little Rachel over to her house every Wednesday afternoon for painting, crafts, and games – it was something Rachel loved to do. Phyllis's house was a home away from home for our little Rachel.

Sometimes after church on Sunday - after worship and coffee hour and appointments and meetings - we would go over to Phyllis' house to relax and hang out for awhile. While Rachel charged around the house acting as though it were her own, Patty, Phyllis and I would sit in her soft chairs in the living room and chat. I was inevitably overcome by heavy waves of drowsiness, as I often am on a Sunday afternoon. Before long, as I heard Patty's and Phyllis's voices trailing off in the distance, I would slip into a deep sleep. Thirty minutes later, I'd wake up, still hearing Patty and Phyllis' voices in animated conversation.

The first time this happened, I was a bit embarrassed. But Phyllis would always say she thought my falling asleep in her living room on a Sunday afternoon was a compliment to her, because I obviously felt at home enough just to fall sleep right where I was! I was grateful she saw it that way, and of course, she was right!

When we say someone is feeling "at home," we mean that they are feeling comfortable enough to let down their guard, and are feeling relaxed enough to be themselves, as though they were in their in their own living home. It is a relief to come home to our own homes after a long day – to kick off our shoes, take off our ties (if we wear them), and prop up our tired feet on the coffee table. It is a comfort to enter our own homes, be greeted by an excited child or dog happy to see us, and see familiar prints on the walls and photographs of loved ones on the bureau. And it's so relaxing after a long day just to sit down in one's cozy living

room, turn on the TV, and eat ice cream right out of the ½ gallon container! We all prize this feeling of being “at home.”

These associations of comfort and relaxation, of being at home, help us now to understand these words of the risen Christ recorded in the gospel of John: *“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.... Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them...”* Listen to those words again. *“We will come to them and make our home with them.”* Christ is saying, in poetic mystical language, that God, the Father, and Christ, the risen one - however we conceive them, will not be far off or unfamiliar or aloof, but will come to us in love, be relaxed with us, and make their home with us. This is our relationship with God - at ease, at home, and at one, shoes kicked off, feet propped up, and all of us eating ice cream out of the ½ gal container.

This is the spirit that Jesus brought to everyone he met. Jesus was relaxed with people, he had a reputation of being accepting and setting people at ease. He was at home with humanity and with the world, he was at ease with himself, with others, and with God. If there had been internet coffeehouses in his day, he surely would have been there, hanging out with others, chatting, listening to the music, enjoying his latte as he conversed with strangers around the table. The Pharisees criticized Jesus for being this way. They accused him of being *“a glutton and a drunkard”* because apparently he would often be seen at neighborhood banquets or parties or wedding receptions, hanging out with all kinds of people, which was not proper for Rabbis of his day.

In fact, Jesus tells a story about the kingdom of God being like a joyful banquet that took an interesting turn. The friends who were first invited found excuses not to come. So then everyone on the street is indiscriminately invited in – strangers and foreigners, gentiles and minorities, the rich and the poor, the bag ladies and riff-raff, the sick and healthy, the lame and the blind, the righteous and the unrighteous – everyone, everyone on the street, everyone is invited in to the joyful banquet. This image of inclusion and extravagant welcome is Jesus’ image of God’s spirit and God’s kingdom. Jesus loved people and accepted all their different sides. Do you?

Jesus had a very big spirit. His mind was very spacious – it had room for everyone, for every situation, for every moment, for everyone’s rough edges and immature reactions. Jesus’s spirit was so big and so spacious that it tenderly held both people who understood him and stood by him, and people who were hostile toward him and double-crossed him. He loved them all. His heart was an ocean of God’s love, and somehow he was at home with all the imperfections and agitations of this world.

Everyone who came into Jesus’ energy field felt this big, spacious spirit of Jesus. You can feel it when you ponder the things he taught, when you hear him saying,

“Love your neighbor as yourself,” and when he goes on to say, *“You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’”* The big mind of Christ is also apparent when you hear Jesus say, *“Do not judge.. why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?”* or when he says, *“If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if any one wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well...”* And finally you can feel the vast spaciousness of Christ’s heart when you hear him say on the cross to those who wanted to hurt him, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* This is the big mind of Christ expressing itself.

Listen to the poet Rumi who describes this big mind of Christ that provides a healing home for every moment, for every part of ourselves, and for every human being that comes into our lives whether we like them or not. In his poem *“The Guest House,”* Rumi writes, *“This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival - a joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in. Be grateful for whoever comes because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.* (Coleman Barks, 1995, Harper Collins, pp. 109)

This is the kind of mind that is at home with the world, with what is. It sees each present moment not as wrong or terrible because there is inconvenience or imperfections. The big mind of Christ lovingly embraces it all. When the risen Christ says, *“the Father and I will come and make our home with you,”* it is important to know that that home they are making with us is a very spacious and accepting one where there is no judgment, like Rumi’s guest house, like our friend Phyllis Cook’s home.

Christ’s guest house holds all your tears, all your misdeeds, all your malice, all your challenges. And not just your tears and challenges - but everyone’s. The risen Christ, and God the Father, make their home with every human being, even those we think don’t deserve it, even those who have hurt us or frustrated us. The big mind of Christ, which reflects the infinite spaciousness of God, is at home with everyone and everything, imperfections and all.

The Christian journey is about letting this big spirit of Christ enter us and make its home in us. This big Spirit not only heals us, but it expands us and makes us different people. We start taking on and expressing this big spacious mind of Christ that is utterly relaxed with and appreciative of life, just as it is. As we allow this big mind of Christ to become our mind, we begin to see just how small minded and rigid and unforgiving we can be.

We observe without a lot of judgment and fanfare, just how quick we are to take offense, judge others, and justify ourselves. We see just how quick we have been to assume that others are at fault, that their views are inferior to our own. We see how we are often at odds with the present moment, that we are usually unsatisfied with things, not appreciating what we have. It becomes painfully obvious that we have a small petty mind that offers meager amounts of love and grace compared to the vast spacious mind of Christ that tenderly accepts and holds all things.

Paul says, *“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”* As Christ was relaxed with each imperfect moment and person, so we should cultivate the same mind. This means that in situations of conflict or tension or disagreement, that we need to step out of our defended little minds and take on the big mind of Christ which, like the ocean, respectfully holds all viewpoints and feelings, hopes and experiences.

This doesn't mean that truth is relative, and that nothing matters to God. But it does mean that a high priority of God is that we express this big mind of Christ, which has space for each person, each living thing, each ordinary moment. That big mind does not easily draw lines in the sand, or create divisions between people. It does not hold too tightly to one's possessions or accomplishments. The big mind of Christ is not anxious to assert its own opinions, it does not fall into making judgments about others. As Paul says in I Corinthians 13, *“love is patient, love is kind; it keeps no record of wrongs.”*

The big mind of Christ instead is relaxed and spacious. It does not get caught up in all the human melodramas of action and knee-jerk reaction any more than the vast blue sky gets troubled by a few dark clouds passing through it. The big mind of Christ is creative in seeking reconciliation and peace, because it feels the deep inter-connection of all people and all things. The big mind of Christ can tenderly hold many disparate realities because it remains anchored in faith, faith that the vast love and power of God finds solutions to every problem and wound.

I once had a professor in seminary, at Yale Divinity School, whose name was Norvin Hein. He was an older esteemed professor of World Religions and had in earlier years been ordained as a Christian pastor. I took a course with him on Hinduism. The class was small and some of the students, being Yale graduate students, were quite elitist and full of themselves. One day, Professor Hein was lecturing on a very profound religious concept about the nature of God and reality that Indian philosophers have debated for centuries. In the middle of the lecture, the graduate student sitting next to me raised his hand, and when Professor Hein called on him, he began in a very sanctimonious way to criticize and sarcastically discredit the last 30 minutes of Professor Hein's lecture.

The student was intelligent, and made some good points. But he was so anxious to pick a fight and assert himself that he failed to recognize the paradoxical

nature of what Professor Hein was talking about. My irritation at this guy sitting next to me hit a flash point as I heard him say that he could explain his point better if he could come up to the front of the class and modify what the professor had written up on the blackboard. To my amazement, Professor Hein in a very dignified way, said to the student, *“Oh, do please come up, and show us.”* The student now feeling very proud and self-important gave his own lecture, erasing certain things Prof. Hein had written and wrote up new things. When he had finished, Professor Hein thanked him respectfully, the student sat down, and then Professor Hein just carried on with his own lecture as if nothing had happened.

I was stunned. I had never seen such dignity and grace – he was actually living out the very ideas of the spiritual life that he was lecturing on. He could have easily humiliated that student in front of the class, but he did not. Professor Hein had the big mind of Christ which made room for that obnoxious student, that understood the insecurity beneath that student’s arrogance, and so took no offense, allowed no conflict to arise, but continued his own gentle witness to the light that he knew.

God the Father and the spirit of Christ have already come and made their home in you. And they are at home and at one with you. Now they are asking you to be at home with the rest of humanity, to be at home with what is, so that you may now express the big mind of Christ to everyone you meet.

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