

**Finding the One**  
**Homecoming Sunday, September 17, 2023, 10:00 a.m.**  
**All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Mike Kinman**

*If a person had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, would they not leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and go in search for the one that wandered off?*

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Welcome home, All Saints.

Welcome home.

It is good to be here.

It is good to be home.

You know, the older I get ... and I'm in that kind of no man's land between young and old right now ... and I don't know about you, but it sure feels like they keep moving the goalposts on both of those things ... but one thing I know is that we are all getting older and the older I get, the more elusive the whole idea of home becomes.

When I was little, I was so blessed that it was easy.

It wasn't Norman Rockwell, but on the other hand at least it wasn't Shameless or Succession, either.

Home was my house on East Rosewood in Tucson, Arizona – from when I was a year old until I left for college.

Home was Vin Scully's voice wafting from my clock radio on a summer night and reruns of the Brady Bunch on our black and white Zenith TV while I waited for my dad to come home from work.

Home was St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church and School where the incense was so thick I literally passed out while acolyting, and where the rector pulled us out of class to join him in picketing the Salvadoran ambassador's visit to Tucson after the assassination of archbishop Romero.

Yeah .... I've been this way for awhile.

And now?

Now, a young couple lives in that house on East Rosewood, Charlie Steiner brings us Dodger baseball, and frankly when I think about the Brady Bunch the only thing I can think about is how in the world an architect could design much less live in a house where six kids share one bathroom.

And the church? It's still there. Same with the school. And of course neither one is the same. The school is bigger, and the church is smaller than they were back in the 70s. And the dad who took me there and the mom who took me to SRF meditation group are now buried next to my old English teacher in the church courtyard.

I know where I come from.  
I know where I've been.  
I know where I am now.

But home? That's more elusive.

And I wonder if it's not just me.

Homecoming has a special place in my heart because it was Homecoming 2016 where I first stood here and where we first met.

And it's been a hard seven years that we've been together ... and a really hard last three and a half years. And through it, you have changed me forever in ways for which I am deeply grateful.

And through it, I grown and am still growing in my belief that the model of Christ is vulnerability, and that is how I have tried to be among you. And my hope has always been that to the degree I've been able to be vulnerable with you all it is to create a space where we can join together in being real and being vulnerable with each other.

Because I don't know a lot of places in this world where there is safe space for that to happen. And yes, I know there is a business side to church and there is a justice and mission side to church ...and yet I have always believed that what is revolutionary about who the revolutionary Jesus longs for us to be is simply a community that can be real with each other.

Where we can meet in that place of vulnerability and find the healing, grace and forgiveness we just can't seem to find anywhere else.

Where each of us can fully become who God is calling us to be and not worry that the space anyone else takes up leaves any less for us.

Where we can begin to trust that centering someone else's experience and perspective, joy and pain is not something to be feared or even something that needs to send us into shame ... but an invitation into the vulnerability of the compassionate life ... of literally suffering with the other so together we can heal.

And so, yes, it has been a hard seven years ... and an even harder past three and a half years ... for all of us.

And we have seen our nation and really the world deal with the pain by leaning in the opposite direction of the vulnerability of Christ ... by leaning toward fundamentalisms and polarization that fearfully deny our own struggles. By pretending we are absolutely fine and absolutely right and turning those who disagree with us into equally as fictional and deeply demonic caricatures.

Our world increasingly encourages us to see the other as an enemy to be defeated instead of giving us the strength and courage to acknowledge that we are all deeply wounded people in need of healing.

And I say “we,” because I know sometimes, I have slipped into that myself.

And to be honest, sometimes I haven’t known how not to.

When people with whom I disagree are literally threatening the lives of people I love and care about, it’s hard for me to restrain the impulse that Father Fowler instilled in me way back in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at St. Michael’s School to stand with and in between those people and those who might hurt them.

When the world is more and more lashing out against LGBTQ people, BIPOC people, immigrants and people experiencing homelessness, it’s hard for me not be strident in my speech and action ... because the stakes are so incredibly high for those among us who increasingly find ourselves in the crosshairs.

And I know when I have done that as much as my words and actions have been balm to some they have been alienating to others.

And so, to quote Kendrick Lamar,

“As I get a little older, I realize life is perspective.  
And my perspective may differ from yours  
I wanna say thank you to everyone that’s been down with me.”

And being down with me doesn’t mean agreeing with me either in message or tone but just hanging together as we try to survive, grow and even thrive in this absolutely bananas time in our history that we find ourselves sharing.

And so, whether you are walking into this church or logging in for the first time today or whether you are Jean Bruce Poole who has been here I think since the Eisenhower administration, or somewhere in between, I want to say thank you for whatever has brought

you here and kept you here. Because it has been a remarkable and sometimes excruciating tension in which we have been trying to live.

We deal with the tension every single day.

How do we stand against systems and yet still love people?

How do we practice Radical Inclusion when there are pieces of our own culture that literally are killing beloved children of God?

How do we live lives of Courageous Justice without falling into the trap the Kenyan scholar and prophet Esther Mombi named when she lamented that the problem with the very word justice is that too often when we say it our necks stiffen and our ears close?

How do we live lives of Joyful Spirituality and still honor those among us who are actively wounded by the form that spirituality sometimes takes?

How do we live lives of Ethical Stewardship when our attempts to follow the revolutionary Jesus threaten the very resources we have been taught to believe we need for this church to survive?

The land of easy answers is so far behind us that it is a mirage in the distance over our shoulder, and the only thing we can be certain about the future is that it will less resemble the past than any comparable era in recent history. And that's not exactly comforting for many of us and yet for others of us that brings a "woo-hoo" and a "bring it on!"

We live in this tension every day. And the temptation is just to pick a side and go all in and hope that might makes right.

And yet ... God softly whispers in our ear a call to something different that does not fear the tension but trusts that the only future that is worth anything lies in leaning into it.

And so ... here we are. It's homecoming and you are – we are -- a testament to our resilience as a people.

In one of the most destabilizing times in our history as a church, when that destabilization is driving so many to the poles of fundamentalism ... both liberal and conservative ... we are here trying to do what to the rest of the world is increasingly bizarre.

Lean into nuance and complexity, weakness and vulnerability, grace and humanity.

We are trying to look at those the world would have us other and instead of saying "what is wrong with you" ask "what happened to you" ... all the while ... and this is the really hard part ... trying to be as honest as we can about what has happened to each and all of us ... and not to let our own internal Greek choruses of "what is wrong with you" grip us in fear and self-doubt.

The older I get, the more elusive home becomes for me ... and it's not just because the places have changed but because the world has changed and continues to change. And that means All Saints Church has changed and continues to change.

And wherever we have change, there is gain and there is loss. And one of the things that makes it so challenging is the same change that some experience as gain others experience as loss ... and that tempts us to think in terms of winners and losers, of those who are welcome and those who are cast out.

Replacement theology is not just prevalent among those who marched with tiki torches in Charlottesville or who stormed the US Capitol ... whenever any of us have enjoyed being centered in a community, when the culture of the community reflects our culture, and we feel the attention trained and power shifting even for a little bit to someone else, the temptation from our polarizing culture is to feel like we are being displaced forever. And that's because it can really feel that way.

Home is an elusive concept. We can walk into a place and immediately it feels like home ... and just as quickly sometimes the place that has felt like home can feel incredibly not.

And when that happens, it is painful.

Matthew Desmond, in his amazing book, Evicted, says that "Eviction is a cause, not just a condition, of poverty."

That's not just about the material poverty that comes from losing our physical homes. It is about the emotional, spiritual and societal poverty that comes from becoming unmoored, from losing those places and communities that have helped us make meaning out of life.

There have always been segments of society that have experienced eviction ... particularly in times of enslavement, internal displacement and forced migration ... but certainly not in my lifetime has there been the broad societal and spiritual unmooring that we are experiencing now.

In a recent article in The Atlantic entitled, provactively and accurately enough, "How America Got Mean," David Brooks notes that

\*The percentage of people who say they don't have close friends has increased fourfold since 1990.

\*More than half of all Americans say that no one knows them well.

\*The percentage of high school students who report 'persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness' shot up from 26 percent in 2009 to 44 percent in 2021

\*Hate crimes rose in 2020 to their highest level in 12 years

\*Suicide rates have increased by more than 30 percent since 2000

\*In 2000, 2/3 of American households gave to charity, in 2018, fewer than half did.

\*In 1967, about 85 percent of incoming college students said they were strongly motivated to develop a 'meaningful philosophy of life'. By 2000 only 42 percent said that. By 2015, 82 percent of students said wealth was their aim.

And through it all, the institutional church, which until now has been a primary place for us to come together and make meaning together but which now is just one more declining legacy institution ... instead too often mirrors rather than transforms the vitriol and venom.

And we are feeling it. As a nation, we are increasingly adrift and struggling where to turn. We are tuning out and the places we are tuning in to are often poisoning us.

It has been called an epidemic of loneliness, disconnection and meaninglessness. Medical professionals, teachers and yes, clergy ... and I'm sure others ... are all experiencing what is being called "great resignations."

The strikes by hotel hospitality workers, writers, actors and auto workers all have the common threads of people being left behind by the change we all find ourselves in the middle of

...of the increasing prevalent view that technology and productivity are a valid or even superior substitute for humanity.

... of the temptation for those who can to grab what they can and to hell with whomever gets hurt.

We are living in a culture of eviction that goes far beyond the hundreds of thousands of people experiencing homelessness on our streets and the millions more who are just one paycheck away.

And yes, here at All Saints Church, even as we are thrilled that so many new people have found your way here, we join with other faith communities across the country in looking around and noticing that some of the people who used to call this home and who used to make this place feel like home for many of us are no longer here.

And we hurt for them, and we hurt for ourselves.

And can I just say that I share the delight and the pain in both of those things.

I am absolutely thrilled that so many of you have found a home here at All Saints ... particularly in the past three years – and particularly across the country and around the world. And I am deeply grieved not just that people have left but that some have left feeling that this church has left them. That some have left feeling evicted.

I ache for those who have left because if you are out there somewhere listening, I know you ache too. Because this has been your home. This has been sacred space and sacred community and there is a special kind of pain of not feeling home is home anymore.

And yet there is such good news, because in this morning's Gospel and in the vibrant life of this gathered community, Jesus gives us a roadmap to reconciliation ... a roadmap to the revolution of love that we all so desperately need.

Jesus says, "If a person had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, would they not leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and go in search for the one?"

Now let's be clear. This is not Jesus saying to reverse course and revert to whatever provides short term comfort for the most people. And ... it IS a call to be living witnesses to the reconciling love of Christ in a world that increasingly sees people as disposable.

Earlier this year, I had a conversation with Angela Glover Blackwell, past president and current board member of the Children's Defense Fund, and we were discussing the work we are each doing in our respective organizations trying to confront racism and create beloved community. And she said something that has stuck with me because of its surpassing wisdom.

She said there will always be people who leave when you embark on this work and not to let that scare you. And, of people who have left or people who are struggling with the change, she said ... "Do everything appropriate to help them to stay." Not "everything you can" but "everything appropriate."

As soon as she said that, I realized the incredible gift that wisdom was because it was precisely an area where I have fallen short as your rector. Not out of a lack of love but out of a lack of wisdom.

And again, it's not about reversing change or even slowing the pace of change to the level of comfort of those of us for whom the way things have been has unknowingly given us comfort at others' expense.

It is of course about not being agents of the hard evictions that are so easy to stand against ... the shouting and pointing and showing people the door. And even more, it is about being

aware of the soft evictions ... of the people who quietly drift off, whose aches are more silent sobs than defiant cries ... of those who it is too easy to reduce to our own assumptions about why they are no longer here instead of taking the time to enter into the struggle with them and listen to their pain.

“What happened to you?”

It is about treating every single person as a bearer of the image of God.

It is about listening not only to the stories of joy and liberation but the stories of pain and eviction and always asking the question “what does healing look like?” and doing everything we can to bring that healing into reality.

Because what makes this community amazing is not our past accomplishments ... as incredible as those have been.

What makes this community amazing is that for generations we have tried against increasing pressure and odds to leave the 99 and stand with the one so that the 99 and one can be reconciled. To meet theologies of eviction with the practice of radical welcome. To create a home where nobody has to tone themselves down, nobody replaces anybody, and everyone has an equal seat at Christ’s table and an equal chance to shape the future that is our common destiny.

And we have done it incredibly imperfectly and I know we have done a lot right and I have also made a thousand mistakes and I am not ashamed of a single one of them because every mistake named and learned from is one step closer to the community God is calling us to be.

I said before that home has become an increasingly elusive concept for me as I have gotten older.

I felt that this summer as I drove away from burying my father in Tucson not knowing when or if I would ever return.

I felt that as I wept as I left Gandhi’s ashram in Ahmedabad, India, unprepared for how much that place had instantly felt like home and yet certain that I could not stay.

And yet as I stand here, I realize that home isn’t so elusive after all.

Home is here.

Home is you.

I love this place and I love you. And my dream is that as many people as possible can be drawn to this place and this community to discover the same love and joy as I have.



So this year, as we will begin to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this building let us renew our commitment to go out into the world and find the one who has wandered off, the one who has yet to find us, the one who believes eviction is their destiny.

This year, let us reach out and listen deeply to each other's stories and together grasp the balm of healing that love never fails to provide.

This year, let us make it our joy and our mission to say to as many of God's wandering ones as possible ... welcome home.

AMEN.