

“I’m a person with no address”

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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I was sitting in a hospital room one morning with a dear old saint whose last few years have involved being shuffled from home to home, to the hospital and back again, and whose next destination is unclear. At one point, this person looked at me with a mixture of sadness, resignation, and nearly defeated longing and said, “I’m a person with no address.”

I walked through the hospital hallways, past the innumerable falling-apart bodies for whom the aggregate of these sterile white walls and beeping monitors and anguished cries and faux food housed in plastic might represent their final address. I thought about how hard it must be to feel like all your belonging and permanence in the world has been used up, to feel like you are little more than a problem to deal with, one more sad soul to be shuffled efficiently off toward death.

I thought about the Syrian families that we are hoping to welcome to Lethbridge, Alberta, very soon. I thought about the things they have seen, the things they have experienced, things that I, who have only every known belonging, can scarcely imagine. I thought about what it must be like to be constantly drifting across borders, searching for security, for welcome, for answers, for direction. I thought about what it must be like to feel that you don’t belong anywhere, that you are unwanted, discarded, incidental to the machinations of violence and business-as-usual politicking of a world gone mad.

I thought about a recent time when I was sitting at a boardroom table with a Syrian woman as we attempted to finalize the application documents to bring her family to Lethbridge. We had puzzled over the portion of the forms that required an “address.” “What can I put here?” she asked me. “They are in Lebanon, living in a camp. They have no address.” We were told by the people who know about such things to just find an address for them: *Tell them to walk to the nearest intersection that has a street number and write it down. Go to the nearest post office. Find someone they know who has a house or a mailing address. The government needs somewhere to send the documents. They need an address.*

Yes, they need an address. We all do.

It’s an interesting little word, *address*. The word admits of more than one meaning, of course. As a noun, it can refer simply to a place. A place that says, *This is where I can be reached. This is where I belong. This is where the things and the people and the memories and markers that make me **me** are to be found. This is where I locate myself.*

But *address* can also be used as a verb. We address one another as human beings. We reach out, we speak words of comfort and hope, we provide instruction and guidance, we encourage and sustain and accept and welcome. And it seems to me that *address* as a verb is, at its best (for we can always address one another in false and damaging ways, as well), vitally connected to the things we associate with *address* as a noun. In addressing one another as people, whether we are warehoused with the broken down and dying or fleeing violence in desperate search a new home, we say, *you belong somewhere in this world, you matter, you are not forgotten.*

Sometimes it can take a heroic effort of the will to sustain the conviction that there is anything special about human beings. There are so *many* of us, after all, and our stories are so achingly familiar. We look at the scope of human suffering in Syria or at the more mundane tragedies of an everyday trip to the hospital, and it can be very

easy to think, “Well, this is our fate. We march across the earth’s stage for a few decades, we encounter joy, we love, we hate, we hope, we are disappointed, we long, we struggle, we expire.” What’s one more face in an ocean of faces struggling to find a home? What’s one more breaking-down body when all bodies break down eventually?

But we are stubborn animals, aren’t we? We cling to this conviction that we are worthy of an address, both as noun and verb. We refuse to accept that we are unworthy of a place to locate ourselves as human beings, fearfully and wonderfully made, right to the end. And we long to be the recipients of good words—from other human beings, from God—that acknowledge us as nothing less than what we are: bearers of hope and promise and inhabitants of stories with chapters yet untold.

We refuse to live unaddressed lives.

And is this not the message of the incarnation? That God takes an address (noun) among ordinary human beings in an ordinary human body. That God addresses us (verb) in the person of Jesus, the child whose first experience of the world would be that of a refugee, who as an adult had no place to lay his head, who in his life and death and resurrection taught us that God is our final fixed address (noun and verb)—the one who locates us in God and summons us Godward with the very words of life.

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