

Going home (Ephesians 3:14-21)

Paul's surprising wish in Ephesians

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My wife and I have been thinking about selling our house again.

It's a regular cycle for us, and this feels like a natural time for a transition. But we're ambivalent as well. There are the usual thoughts about time, money, energy, friends, and family.

But there is something else as well, a sense that we chose our current house well. Because this house has something that very few houses do: it feels like home.

Well, no, it more than feels like home. It is home, in that elusive sense that only the proper place can be. Diana Butler Bass gets at the mystery of it in her book *Grounded*. She writes,

The places we come to know as “home” involve an intangible flash of recognition, a soul connection that brings forth a different sort of knowing about God, nature, or oneself. Home is a place where God somehow meets us—where we belong.

There's more to it than that. For Bass, home is “inhabited space,” where we touch “spirituality, dreams, psychology, and poetry.”

And even that doesn't exhaust the idea. There is a very common image of home running through old R&B, gospel, country, and right into rock and roll: “going home.”

American musicians dealt with social dislocation in the South and the Black diaspora by expressing a longing to go home. Sometimes that meant a desire to die, to find one's final resting place. Sometimes it just meant going home.

In the same way, veterans speak about bringing one another home, a phrase not limited to bringing servicemen and women back to the US or finding MIAs. It's a figure for finding healing or reintegrating into society. It is both fascinating and immensely saddening to listen to vets talk about how being in the service changes a person. Some say they can never feel completely at home again, in or out of the armed forces.

On a very different note, many of us remember fondly the home we grew up in, or grandma's home where there were always cookies waiting for you. Not all of us, but many.

That his listeners find a home is Paul's surprising wish in Ephesians. He speaks of God the Father, "from whom every family takes its name"—using a pun on "father," (*pater*) and "family" (*patria*)—and continues with a prayer that the Spirit will strengthen the Ephesians so that Christ might live in them. Literally, that he might find a permanent house in their hearts.

So Christ finds a home in Christians, but they also in him: they are to be "rooted and grounded" in love. Home is our bedrock, our foundation, where we center ourselves and build the meaning of our lives.

As Christ finds a home in us and we in him, Paul says, we learn the "breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's love, and we are filled with the fullness of God.

A while back, the strange thought popped into my head that I ought to say thank you to our house more often. Despite our occasional temptation to be unfaithful to it, this is the first house—the first home—I have lived in as an adult that didn't feel temporary. It has been neither a stepping stone on the way to some other place nor dependent on a job that came to an abrupt end.

I cannot say that times have always been good while we've lived here. But while I have lived here, I have never doubted that I could be myself, that I could grow into myself. That includes as a husband, a father, a grandfather, a minister, and many other roles.

I have felt secure here, in other words, centered. No matter who I am or what I am doing, I will always belong to this place in some small way. It has given me a place to live in the love of my family, and for that I am very grateful. I hope that you have a home that does the same for you, and that in that home, you will be filled with the “love that surpasses all knowledge.”