

January 4, Christmas 2 (Jeremiah 31:7–14; John 1:(1–9), 10–18)

The child staggering out of a bomb-blasted city does not need to find her home in God. She needs a physical home.

by [Mindy Misener](#) in the [January 2026](#) issue

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Every night, as I turn off the light in my children’s room, the request arrives: Tell us a story. I’m not sure why they insist. My stories are random at best, invented on the spot and narrated through a haze of parental fatigue. One never knows what will happen in them, least of all me. Recently, for example, a bison showed up. Bison don’t typically appear in my stories, but the children are familiar with them, because until about a year ago we lived in Montana.

I don’t remember what the bison did in the story. What I do know is that suddenly my voice swelled with sorrow, then broke. I’d never wept about a bison before, but then again, I wasn’t weeping about a bison. I was weeping because the bison belonged to a place I miss so much it hurts. I was weeping for home.

Most people lose at least one home in their lifetime. If we are very lucky, we lose our homes to time, to circumstances that aren’t all bad. We might still live in the city of our birth, but that city is no longer what it used to be, and we ache for the old sights and sounds; we might leave a place in pursuit of a dream or a calling. If we are unlucky, our homes are swept from us—or we are swept from our homes—by natural disaster, by war, by the decisions of well-dressed people in climate-controlled rooms. Losing a home in one of these latter ways is nothing short of traumatic.

The traumatic loss of a home can be so defining an agony that even the process of return may be marked by sorrow, a point attested to when the prophet Jeremiah, speaking for God on the subject of summoning Israel back to its homeland, says, “With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back.” God’s tenderness toward oft-overlooked or weakened people staggering toward home—God’s understanding of how momentous this is—is everywhere apparent in this passage. God promises to “let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble,” a notable risk to those whose sight is compromised by tears.

But one does not need to have lived as a refugee to know that a trip home can be complicated by grief. Anyone traveling home after significant time away—or even in the wake of a life-altering event—carries with them a question of grave concern: Is home still home?

In the vision put forth by Jeremiah, the answer is yes. Home is still home. The people arriving there are “radiant,” there is dancing and gladness and comfort.

But there are times when the answer is no.

John 1 tells us that Christ “came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” The NRSVue offers a footnote with an alternate translation: Christ “came to his own home.” Christ came home, and home rejected Christ. Imagine the grief.

It’s true that even this rejection did not prevent Christ from making a home in this world, such that God’s glory was revealed. The passage also makes clear that many did in fact receive him. Still, the fact that the rejection is

highlighted at all means that it mattered.

I was taught to think of the acceptance or rejection of Christ in John 1 as primarily spiritual. I can't think that way anymore. Verse 12 foregrounds those who *received* Christ—a verb with physical connotations—before reframing them as “[believing] in his name.” In fact, the people we tend to think of as followers of Jesus were the very ones who said—through so many practical invitations—*welcome home*.

It is all too easy to focus on a spiritual welcome of Christ, all too easy to analogize every concrete teaching of Jesus, to give it a nonphysical, numinous meaning that makes it more palatable. Overemphasizing the spiritual implications of home may obscure the implications of real people and physical homes. The child staggering out of a bomb-blasted city does not need to find her home in God. She needs a physical home, and we receive Christ by working to provide her with one.

Scripture makes clear that God is concerned with actual homes. In fact, I grow only more sure that the ultimate and total home we are all promised in God is not a dreamlike abstraction. This home may be beyond all our physics, but it is still as sturdy as matter, as actual as the tears we shed for the homes we have all lost along the way. May any achings for home we feel spur us to make this world a home for all; may our every glad homecoming be unbridled and full, a trustworthy sign of our ultimate, very real belonging.