August 25, 2024

Hello. For those of you who don’t know me, my name is Lyf (like a tree) and I have been coming here for a couple of years now. I’m opinionated, verbose, love the sound of my own voice and am an actor by training (kind of makes sense eh?!).

Before I begin, I would like to let you know that I chose the Matthew verse for today and I will not be referencing it at all. That’s my bad. I was stuck, in a jam and could only think of that verse as a reference to home, even though it’s pretty plain that it’s actually about discipleship. That having been said, keep it in the back of your mind though because at the end of this talk..well, I’ll get to that at the end. Now…let’s begin talking about home.

Home is a place of tension. This sounds wrong. I know it feels wrong to say it. We often think of home as a place of safety and often times comfort. Those aren’t wrong (maybe a bit misleading and wrought with their own inherent problems), and they also aren’t a complete picture of home. If we were to stop there many of us actually wouldn’t have a home. How many places do you feel safe and comfortable? When I articulate it like that, for many of you, you could say anywhere you go, anywhere you are - heck, you might even say you are at home here. And you wouldn’t be wrong but you also wouldn’t be 100% right either.

A key component missing in this conversation is this: other people.

In conversations around safety, comfort and home, we rarely think about other people. We tend to think about it myopically (my latest favourite word). By that I mean we lack imagination and focus on ourselves. It’s baked in. It’s a cultural thing. Rugged individualism. Personal salvation. Do what’s best for you!

I, I, I, ME, ME, ME.

A lot of the stuff you read online about safety and comfort do not include thinking about other people. And sure, that might work for some people, “SOME” people, but not in the long run. You see, we don’t exist in a vacuum. Every day we interact with other people. In places we call home, there are often other people: our favourite coffee shops, churches, friends’ houses, our parent’s homes, etc…. In fact, it’s not uncommon to say to another person, “Thank you for making me feel at home.” We don’t say that to ourselves or to a vacuum. What is it then we are thanking them for?

I would argue that often times what we are thanking them for is a place where we can be ourselves. We feel heard, listened to, and respected regardless of whether or not we share the same values and opinions. But this isn’t easy. In order to listen and respect others, we need to embrace tension.

In many of the verses about home, tension is non-existent. They either refer to a home in another plane of existence (the LORDS house, the courts of the LORD) which seems to not allow any tension or personality whatsoever (odd isn’t it that the afterlife seems void of personality and character?), or they are a fortress and one thing that must not be in a place like a fortress is internal tension that threatens the sense of safety, comfort and “peace” - “a house divided against itself cannot stand.”

Why is this so? Is this so because of our translations or interpretations of scripture? Is it because of our cultural biases? I don’t know, I didn’t have time to go deep into this (to be honest, I wrote this last night. Figuring out what to talk about was frighteningly elusive.). Maybe one day. But for now, I want to focus on why tension is important to a sense of home.

Many of you know that I used to work at Sanctuary. Sanctuary is a community downtown with the poor and excluded at its heart. Many who are marginalized struggle with a sense of home - having been rejected by their families, society, friends, well, just about everyone, to know what home means is nearly impossible. Over the years though, you could tell when some people felt more at home because they let their guards down. For some this manifested in their willingness to be more vulnerable - expressing their deep pain through tears. For some, the vulnerability exhibited itself as something vastly more terrifying, well, initially more terrifying. This sense of home came out as anger and frustration. I will add as a caution though that I think violence is very different than anger and frustration. Violence is never ok. Period. Full stop. And something that is very difficult is knowing how to express anger and frustration without resorting to violence. Many people at Sanctuary were incapable of expressing these intense emotions without being violent in some way or another. HOWEVER! The fact that they felt comfortable to express these emotions at all in our space would often serve as a reminder to those of us on staff that there was a change happening.

Now, to be perfectly clear and honest - not all expressions of anger, frustration and violence were evidence of that development of vulnerability. And yet many were. We had to keep reminding ourselves of this in our own lives as well, something we all took for granted. We could be vulnerable with those in our homes - honest, afraid, angry, frustrated, devastated. In a proper home, you feel like you can fall apart and the people (VERY IMPORTANT HERE) will be there for you. Home doesn’t happen in isolation. And just because some people don’t feel at home somewhere doesn’t mean the people there don’t care about them or support them or are afraid to catch them. That’s something completely different and resides within the person themselves and usually represents a long history (even genetic) of trauma that has left them unable to trust.

I dare say that there are people who can’t, don’t, won’t trust the creator, and so a psalm like the one today has no meaning to them. That has nothing to do with our creator’s heart. Another thing I learned about home working at Sanctuary is that intention is very important. To make a space ready, to make your heart ready, these are just as important to a sense of home. A space must be ready to accept those who would call it home without judgement.

Yes, there are caveats all over the place. There are exceptions, there are nuances, and there are subtleties. Of course! But when you start making excuses you begin unmaking a home. Nuance and subtleties will always be there and we need to be ready for them, but to make excuses in advance is judgement. This is different from proper planning. To worry about this thing or that thing is to chip away at the foundation before it’s even poured and that’s just no good. It’s similar to a trap our culture and society are in now - make rules for the exceptions instead of recognizing them as exceptions. Now that is a wild tangent that I will refuse to go down, no matter how tempting it is (and those of you who know me know my proclivity for tangenting!).

So, let’s circle back to home and tension.

We can’t be everything to everyone. We must not lie to ourselves thinking that we can be. Not everyone can reap, also, not everyone can sow. But the glory tends to go to those who reap. We must remember that there are those of us who sow seeds of trust without ever seeing the fruit of that seed. Some of us might be doing that right now in our own homes with our own family. And that can feel downright awful. Know this though as well - the seeds you sow will never be wasted. The place you have built may not be a home for a loved one, but it may be a home for someone who has never felt love. We can’t control these things. The best we can do is be ready. Lay a solid foundation of trust, love free from judgement, and welcome. So…

Are you ready…If Jesus says that the animals of the field and air have homes but he doesn’t and the call to follow him will likely mean the same for us, what does that mean in light of what I’ve shared today? What does that mean to you?