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Where is Home?

By The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

Last week was filled with many different emotions for me and for our family. We returned from vacation where we were all together. First, our oldest son returned to his job in New York City. Then we took our middle son back to college. Then Patty and I went to my late parents' home to retrieve special pieces of furniture before we close on the sale of their home.

Then, rounding out the week, we took our youngest son to begin his first year of college. In all of this, we had both fun moments and heartbreaking moments. We had times when we felt like so much that we know and love is passing away. This echoes a struggle I have long felt, and one I feel so many of us experience.

I grew up in a very small town. Most families knew one another, and many families had been there for centuries. The community had a deep connection to the land and to the seasons. The encircling mountains seemed to mirror the comfortable security of our small town. Yet it was hard

to be different in any way there, and the town required a strong pressure to conform.

My journey first took me away from my home community decades ago. That journey has since led me to be among wildly different sorts of people and situations. I have been shaped and broadened by all of those experiences. Yet, I hope I always retain some of those small-town values on which I was raised and that formed me.

Through all of these experiences, I have to ask, “Where is home?”

Home is where I am with people I love – dear family and friends. Home is where I have been a part of communities that have welcomed and nurtured me, while also challenging me. The community of the Church has left an indelible mark for the good on my soul.

And yet, all of these aspects of “home” change, and I change. What remains?

A basic truth I learned in my childhood, which I embrace perhaps even more strongly today, is that our true home is in God. St. Augustine said famously, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”

Though we may try to fill our need for home and security, for meaning and purpose in a hundred different ways and with countless activities, substances, or “toys,” there is a God-shaped hole within each of us that only God can fill.

I am reminded of this truth from Scripture which tells us, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). As we enter more fully into relationship with Christ, we are changed, and we move towards home.

St. Paul tells us, “So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When I officiate at funerals, I often say that one of the most faithful questions we can ask of the dearly departed is “What are they experiencing

now? What is it like, now that they are truly home, truly present with the God of the Universe? What's it like to be with the source of all love, beauty, purpose, and meaning, for eternity?" They are home, where healing from the wounds and losses of this life is taking place, and they are becoming ever more whole.

I often heard my Grandmother hum an old Gospel tune while she was working. It goes like this:

"This world is not my home; I'm just passing through.
The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

We can disagree with one sentiment of that song, though, because our Anglican theology offers us such a helpful corrective. We believe that eternity begins now, not at death. We enter eternity more completely at death, of course, but our oneness with God all starts now. Family is part of the experience of eternity and of home. So are friends, and so is our work. Christian community is definitely part of that. Love and loss are all part of living into eternity – the kingdom of God – even on earth.

A Bishop I worked with in London put it this way: "It's not just pie in the sky when you die; it's about steak on your plate, while you wait!"

Indeed. Aren't we blessed to be waiting, and learning, and growing *together*, while we wait for our home coming, even as we experience some of home now?