

Happy Homecoming Sunday. Fall has arrived. Thanks to Hutch, Ron, and Kate for chairing the Celebration. Thanks to everyone who has worked hard to make it all happen. I was walking our campus late yesterday afternoon and when I saw things set up, my heart grew warm with the love you bring to our community. In that spirit, we welcome the Love Choir and band, and give a shout out to our own St. Patrick's choir, back from its summer recess, a group of good friends who love to sing to God.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that today is the 2048-or-something birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which marks the beginning of the Orthodox Christian Year. Which is to say today is a Sunday of celebration, a Sunday of song, a Sunday of feasting, not an occasion for long and theologically complex sermons. There is, of course, that nagging question in the Gospel about Jesus the threshold guardian and the Syrophonecian woman who calls his bluff when he calls her a dog, and we'll get to them. Just not now.

Because today is Homecoming Sunday and the second Sunday in the Season of Creation when we let the world astound us, and we are here. As I promised last Sunday, I'm going lay down my theological nerd's hat to say a few words about Home.

My old Russian teacher, Vera Tchikovani, loved to tease her American students that we had no idea about the true nature of home. "You buy and sell everything, but home is not a thing. It's a destination. In Russian, home is where we go, not what we own. In Russian, a corner of a crowded room can be 'home,' because 'Home' is wherever and with whom we lay our heads. Home is a place, a community, a family, not a piece of private property."

She's right. It's presumptuous to think I can own a piece of land that is 4 billion years old and will continue long after I'm gone. There are lots of things we call home that we don't own at all. Think about home base. You can steal it, but you can't own it. Or the homework we wish we

didn't own. The home team. We call this country home, but we do not own it. But, in our infinite cluelessness, we patronizingly call people "homeless" because they do not have permanent housing. What is permanent housing? Does it mean we're not allowed to move because our living room occupies the heights of eternity? And everyone who has a deed to a house knows how impermanent this permanent housing really is every time we have to fix a leaky pipe, replace a roof, repair a wall, or call Roto Rooter. This is hardly the work of eternity except in the sense that it is endless.

I was thinking about these things all summer as I watched mother turkeys raise their young in and around our back parking lot here and in the grassy areas where I live in Oakmont. Not once did these turkeys pause to consider homeowners' dues or their right to inhabit the place where they were. They were not concerned with real estate appreciation or remodeled kitchens. Their food was all around: leaves, grass, seeds, berries, insects, worms, snails, frogs, and small reptiles. They took their chicks on daily walks. No mother was consigned to a single-family isolated existence with noisy children, competing with one another to get the best place in the Ivies for their young; the moms just got together and watched each other's turklets as if all of them were their own. I found myself thinking how nice it would be if human moms could do the same. The turkeys lived fully where they landed. They never had to stand in line at the grocery store or worry about price gouging and they were never bored. Were they human, however, we would call them homeless. Were they human, they would simply laugh.

The turkeys reminded me that earth, not a house in Oakmont is my true home. They reminded me that by every modern definition Jesus was homeless.

Choctaw elder and Episcopal bishop Steven Charleston knows this. He inhabits a world where "Christianity is not a teaching or a message or even a doctrine but an *event*. God's self-

revelation unfolds in time, and redemption is accomplished by what *happens*.” In our second reading this morning Charleston warns us, “Do not doubt what you see: the world is warming, the waters are rising, and the winds are coming stronger than before. Do not turn away, do not pretend not to see, but speak the truth and set the spirits free to heal the world, before the ice has gone, before the last tiger falls, before only the desert remembers the ones who once walked this land.”

Get out of your house and go home. Walk the forests, fields, mountains, valleys and beaches and revel in the birds, animals, lizards and trees relating to one another. A home full of interesting relatives: turkeys, deer, black tailed jackrabbits, coyotes, otters, black bears, mountain lions, elk, hummingbirds, towhees, peregrine falcons and mourning doves, each of whom has a unique message for a unique moment. Don't be like the deaf man in Decapolis: listen to the voice of wind, rain, heat and cold. We are made of earth and earth is where we are born again and again and again.

The season of Creation invites us to see not just heaven as the abode of God, but earth as the body of God. It calls us to meet the divine outdoors, to meet God, not as deity, but as home. Wake up to the animals who live outdoors and have everything. The so-called homeless man who turned down a tiny house because it would take him away from his friends. Why can't we see? Why of all species have we made a fetish of real estate? The season of Creation invites us to return to ourselves and realize that to heal the earth is to heal us all, and that all we need to do is step back and set the spirits free.

So now we arrive at the gospel. A Syrophonecian woman who tells Jesus that choosing one group over another is absolute idiocy. (And by the way, to be Syrophonecian is to be doubly cursed: for those who follow Biblical politics, it's a mixture of Samaritan and Philistine.) And

this Samaritan Philistine at the dinner table says, “What do you mean you feed only the Children of Israel and call me a dog when the real dogs are under the table happily gathering crumbs? My daughter, my female child, has a demon, and you’re here, sharing a mission statement of who’s in and who’s out. Get real, Jesus.”

We women can be like that. Like those lovely turkeys, we spend a lot of time battling for the ones we love. We know our daughters are as important as our sons.

And of course, her love melted Jesus’ strategic plan. She asked, not for a gift for herself, but a gift in the name of love.

God never says no to love.

Welcome home, dear ones. Amen.