***Heaven Is Not My Home***

A sermon preached at Lawrence Park Community Church, April 28, 2019

Matthew 6:10 (*on earth as it is in heaven . . .)*

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“There is no place like home,” says Dorothy, in the *Wizard of Oz*.

Well, of course, there is no place like home. We all agree. Even if home turns out to be Kansas rather than New York City, or Wawa instead of Toronto. There is no place like home.

But where is home, for you, exactly? Ultimately?

We all know places that are not home, after all. For me, “not home” is the gym.

Let me tell you about my gym. I dislike it, to put it politely, even though, as far as gyms go, mine isn’t the worst. I mean, my gym has a whirlpool. It has tennis courts, a salt-water pool and a sauna—that I don’t use. My gym has a free hot towel service and even a licensed restaurant.

But still, it’s a gym. I force myself to go three times a week. When I’m there, I can’t help but notice that I am an apple dumpling compared to most of my fellow gym members. I sweat at the gym. I strain at the gym. That’s not fun. My elliptical machine’s TV may be kaput. The shampoo dispenser in the shower is often empty.

I definitely don’t feel “at home,” at the gym. But, where do you feel at home?

Many of you will probably answer that you feel most at home in your own house, with your family. That’s certainly true for me, too. But on a more spiritual plane, many Christians believe that their truest home, the place they most want to be, the place they long for above every other place, is heaven—while earth is merely their cosmic and spiritual version of the gym. For many Christians, through the ages, heaven is their true home, while earth is a waiting room.

This is an ancient idea that can be traced—in part—back to the great Greek philosophers. Plato argued that the body was a prison cell, and that the material earth was the jail. The soul, said Plato, longed to escape these material chains. In scripture, Paul sometimes argues with himself about which he prefers—to be at home here with his body, or to be at home with the Lord. The Book of Revelation, a long imaginative allegory, does have some fetching descriptions of a New Jerusalem with streets paved in gold and a sun that never sets. And so, Christians have always longed to be free of the flesh, longed for heaven as their true home—whatever heaven may, exactly be.

In fact, the best-selling novel of all time, from 1675, *The* *Pilgrim’s Progress,* is also an allegory about how heaven is our true home. In *Pilgrim’s Progress,* the hero, Christian, a citizen of the City of Destruction, gets it in his head that he should leave his home there and set out for the Celestial City. He journeys through the Slough of Despond, the Town of Carnal policy, the Hill of Difficulty, Doubting Castle, and the riotous temptations of Vanity Fair—almost, at each point, giving into temptation and giving up his dream of a heavenly mansion. However, after overcoming all these earthly temptations, he finally enters the river of death and passing through arrives at the Celestial City. In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, heaven is Christian’s true home, while life on earth is about as pleasing as my life in the gym.

And that’s how it is for many Christians. Consider the lyrics of Jim Reeves famous Country and Western song:

This world is not my home  
I'm just a-passing through  
My treasures are laid up  
Somewhere beyond the blue.

The angels beckon me  
From heaven's open door  
And I can't feel at home  
In this world anymore.

Where is our true home? Earth’s vail of tears or the hymn’s promise that when we’ve been there ten thousand years we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise? Where is our true home, because, you see, how you choose can have significant consequences for how you live your life.

Consider, for example, what John MacArthur, the best-selling author and Evangelical leader, writes:

The environmental movement is consumed with trying to preserve the planet forever. But we know that isn’t in God’s plan… The earth we inhabit is not a permanent planet. It is, frankly, a disposable planet—it is going to have a very short life. It’s been around about six thousand years or so—that’s all—and it may last a few thousand more. And then the Lord is going to destroy it…. I’ve told environmentalists that if they think humanity is wrecking the planet, *wait until they see what Jesus does to it*. Peter says God is going to literally turn it in an atomic implosion so that the whole universe goes out of existence.

For MacArthur, the earth is not home, but a holding cell. It deserves the care and time and attention that a subway car does from a passenger, or hotel room or banquet hall does from a renter. You don’t worry about who is going to clean it tonight or use it tomorrow. You don’t worry about air pollution or oil depletion or global warming or plastic in the oceans because all of these things are just signs of how this world will soon pass away and a new world, a heavenly world, will be brought in by God for his few, chosen, saved Christians. For MacArthur, who is completely focussed on heaven, the environmental movement is a godless heresy.

Of course, MacArthur’s view that the earth is six thousand years old tends to undermine his credibility when it comes to his predictions about how much longer the earth will last and how we should treat it. But positively, now, it is also worth noting that there is in scripture a deep and abiding and powerful portrait of the earth, and indeed the whole cosmos, as being a beautiful, precious reality that should be celebrated, cared for, and embraced as our one and only home.

The earth, says the writer of Genesis, is a place for birds and fish and people to “be fruitful and increase in number.” The writer of Genesis, in telling the creation myth, says of Adam and Eve’s first home, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." This was their life’s purpose. The Psalmist celebrates how “by the streams the birds of the air have their habitation” and how grass grows for cattle and how the earth brings forth food, “wine to gladden the human heart, and oil to make the face shine.”

The New Testament, in turn, which celebrates the splendor of the lily of the field, also bemoans the trouble creation finds itself in and encourages us to do something about it. Paul says "creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." What Paul means is that it *this* creation where we are walking and talking today that is longing for liberation because it knows that a new day is coming when it must be freed from the effects of human exploitation.

We do not understand very much about God. We know little of heaven, if such a place exists at all. The Bible gives us hope on this score, but also contradictory pictures. In the Old Testament, there is no word about life after death, and in the New Testament there are many contrasting pictures of what heaven might be like.

But from the beginning of scripture to the end, scripture celebrates the earth is our splendid divinely-gifted home. Earth is our garden of delight. Planet earth is both our divine responsibility and pleasure. We just heard that from the *Missa Gaia*, too. “For the earth forever turning. For the skies, for every sea, to our Lord we sing, *returning home* to our blue green hills of earth.”

Listen. Heaven is not our home. These blue green hills of the earth are our home. And what we really want for our home’s health and good repair is what Jesus prayed—that it will be done here on earth by us as it is in heaven by God.

Never mind the celestial city. Never mind pearly gates. This is the place. This is the time. Heaven is not our home. This planet is.