

Home! The very word evokes feelings of love and laughter, security and serenity, warmth and welcome. It means mom and dad, fun and games, good food, deep sleep. “Home, home on the range.” “When Johnnie comes marching home.” But a little girl from Kansas says it best, “There’s no place like home!”

Easter means we are going home! Let us unpack this promise.

Isaiah, writing in the eighth century BC, addresses Israelites living in Babylon in the sixth century BC. And these exiles are far away from home. A terrible reality called Babylon was a fire-breathing monster that devastated everything. In 587, the empire decided once and for all to destroy Jerusalem, described in the Babylonian archives as “a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and a place of rebellion from ancient times” (Ezra 4:15).

Now in refugee camps, Judeans are stuck in a land with canals and ziggurats and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the Ishtar Gate and the detestable statue of Marduk. Judah and Jerusalem and the Jordan have been replaced by the building projects of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. Judeans have no king, no temple, no royal city, no land, no sacrifice, no hope, and no future. Oh God! “There’s no place like home!”

The exiles are far away from home but, more pressing, they are far away from the Father. Just like the prodigal son, Israelites demanded their fair share of the inheritance, set off for a distant country, and squandered it all on wild living. The list is long and ugly: enticing Baal worship, seductive Assyrian astral deities, perverting justice and righteousness, worthless worship, false faith. On August 19, 587 BC Jerusalem was destroyed. It was the day the music died!

Some of us may be far away from home but, more pressing, all of us are far away from the Father. It is the way we operate. We are, again, right here, just now, stuck in an exile of our own making. We demand our fair share of the inheritance and set off for distant, seductive, deadly lights. We sell our baptismal promises, but for what? Duplicitous lives, empty relationships, and inflated egos. Then Satan plants his foot on our necks and shouts, "God is finished with you!"

But God speaks to exiles! Isaiah 55:12, "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

Just when the music had died and Israel's history seemed closed and controlled by hopeless Babylonian imperial policy, to the shock and surprise of everyone the Lord stirs up His messiah Cyrus who defeats Babylon and

then releases the exiles. A Servant is wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed. The climax of Isaiah's program in chapters 40-55 is God's promise to bring the exiles home.

Standing behind this promise is God's almighty Word. Earlier Isaiah wrote, "The word of our God stands forever" (40:8). Now the Lord promises that this same Word will never return empty. God said it. That settles it. Faith believes it!

In Bethlehem this powerful Word took on flesh and blood, and He has a heart. Jesus knows the bitter pain of exile. He was far away from home ("Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head" [Luke 9:58]); but, more pressing, He was far away from the Father. Jesus was betrayed, spit upon, and scourged. Stretched out upon the cross, He cries out, "My God, My God. Why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). It was the day the music died.

Yet bodily raised on the third day, the song--check that--the grand symphony of celebration, rocks on (John 1:4; 6:35; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 20:31)!

We all just want a place of love and laughter, security and serenity, warmth and welcome; a place that means mom and dad, fun and games,

good food, deep sleep with no nightmares at midnight waking us up. We just want a home!

Some of you have felt forlorn ever since your husband died, your child was buried, you lost your job, or your doctor pointed out that lump in your breast or that spot on your lung. Others of you wanted a home ever since it collapsed when it was hit by divorce, debt, or debilitating disease.

I may be exaggerating about life, but I could never, ever overstate the promise of the day: Easter means we are going home! Because Jesus lives, we, too, shall live. Because Jesus rose, we, too, shall rise on the last day. And He will take us home, to the New Jerusalem, where there will be no pain, no tears, no cancer, no sickness, no depression, no death, no end!

Jesus promises, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2). This is no dorm room or army barracks or student housing. This is no Super 8 or Holiday Inn Express. This is no Luxury Apartment! It is infinitely better!

The robe and sandals are ready, and so is the ring. The price is paid, the party prepared, the sacrifice complete, and the Father has rehearsed His lines, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost but now he is found" (Luke 15:24).

“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12).

And our response? We “join in the hymn of all creation . . . For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign” (LSB, p. 155). We sing an endless and deathless Hallelujah. Why? We are going home! Amen.