

Our Dwelling Place FHC 7.9.17

"Lord, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations." -

Psalm 90

Like many of you, there is a church home for me. Some of you have named FHC as that place, a church home. For some of you, it is decades of worship, stewardship, fellowship, prayer and service that has kept heart and soul connected to Christ and one another – with this particular place as a rudder. A place where the compass sits and you move into the world from here, refreshed and renewed, encountering once again the world that can be quite harsh, confusing and unforgiving at times. I have heard many stories of how this place has been that home, so special to you. I am delighted at hearing these stories. I hope and pray you will continue to share them with me as we get to know one another.

I have two church homes, as I visit those memories of my faith narrative – one is the place in Pittsford NY where my parents took us, where we worshipped as a family and I had youth group and Sunday school – and the other is the church in MN where I took my children and they had youth group and Sunday school. It was also here where I was affirmed in my call to ministry – there was love in that place for me and my girls. There was prayer, and friendship and trust – it was a church home for me – and I am grateful for those memories.

The current pastor has been there 18 years – very unusual for our UMC tradition, but when Pastor Steve moves on, into retirement I imagine, it will change a bit, it will shift for me a bit. Like it is shifting right now for some of you as Pastor Rebecca is not standing here! I get that //// Steve and I worked together as I began my ministry, and he is special to me in that frame. Even as he leaves, it will be a church home where memories of my sobbing at Emily’s confirmation – both girls singing in the choir I directed, and I had it together by the time Courtney was confirmed so I did not embarrass her, I hope, at her spiritual moment. It is a church home. Do you have a place like that? Is this that place for some if not many of you? I pray I am able to help you in the journey of this church home as a place of connecting with love, building memories, friendship, as we worship God and wander in the mystery of our faith.

When I think about it, a home—a dwelling place as the scripture spoke—may not necessarily be the place of our address. What if a dwelling place is an ever-present spirit of hospitality and affirmation that goes with us wherever we go. Didn’t Bill Tomek speak to that last week, hospitality as a central value, a central embodied fruit of the spirit that the congregation has cultivated as an expression of God’s great love? I felt it in the room, and I am grateful. I felt it in the cherry pie, scones and sandwiches, the fruit and coffee, thank you Elizabeth and Scott and Carol and all. I felt it in your warmth – even though you are grieving the transition of bidding farewell to Rebecca’s pastoral leadership among you, and seeing me standing here - how strange? Will this take some

getting used to? Can we still call this place home where love and peace in Christ is nourished? I hope and pray this is so. Prayerfully, let's try.

In part because we have been called together to the journey, and we are collectively willing to heed the call. And I am once again, grateful. But there is another compelling reason, too: what if a dwelling place is much more than an address? What if It is God's relentless invitation to every sojourner to "come home" and find rest and restoration for our weary souls? What if this invitation is never ending – eternal in its purpose, knowing that joy is the ultimate conclusion?

This past week I was at Casowasco as the chaplain. There were nearly 200 campers, there was staff and teen counselors, too. There was a power outage, there were lake shutdowns because the water was so high – the powers that say they can banned boating, banned boating because of tree-limb run-off into the water. And it was murky from the rain so if you could not see at least 2 feet, down, no swimming. There was some missing mommy, and there was worship with energy of children and youth, there were games and arts and chants and bible study – it was a lot of fun. And there are campers that come back to that place year after year – one boy has been coming since he was 7 and how he is 16 – many of the staff have come up through camping, to cabin counselors to year round staff. It is a culture of love and commitment – and they call it home, summer after summer. Not because it is fun to swat mosquitos or eat a breakfast of corn dogs that

are sausage on the inside – it is because the connection to Christ and freedom to explore what it means to be faithful, or not, is honored. It a home where all are welcome. We draw the circle wide.

Home is the place where the embodied spirit of love says, I see you, I love you, I honor you and I will journey with you. It is where we learn to be grateful, and learn to be joy-filled, flexible, accepting and how the fruits of the spirit reveal themselves and meaning is shaped. Meaning for life, meaning that is a compass, meaning that is intentionally sought and learned. Can we learn one another in this way, together, here?

So the dwelling place is a church family, it also is a cousin with whom you share a remarkable resonance, a friend who lives in Nebraska or Arizona or Maine but the minute you talk or see one another – you just pick up like it was the easiest thing in the world – or perhaps that once a week gathering of colleagues you trust, the one you attend regularly for coffee and a sandwich. I think these are precious and sacred times and I hope we all seek them out, that we are on the lookout for these people, moments and relationships. These embodied moments become our dwelling places, because love is shared, and God breathes a sigh of relief when love is that real.

If we frame our living in the light of the One who loved us first – we can recognize in our humanness, our frailty, where we are called to be; this POV, this faithful perspective is a centerpiece of hospitality, as Bill said,

because we are the dwelling place for love to come alive. We reside in the Lord in all the places and relationships with people we encounter. This is the embrace of a human connection that Christ came to dwell among us to honor – and through his grace we find ourselves, home. It is home. Home where we are called to be – and if you go with God, you will never be far from home, ever.

Our locations change from time to time. But isn't it good to know that in the spirit of God's welcoming embrace, we can always come home?

Emily and I have prepared a song to pull this all together -

Prayer

Lord, in the midst of so much transition and relocation, we thank you for being our constant dwelling place—even from generation to generation. Because of you, we are never without a home. Amen.