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The Message: No Place Like Home

'Morar, why ever did you choose **this** passage from Isaiah? Surely there are more Christmassy ones!'

Isaiah is a prophet who warns Israel's corrupt leaders that their rebellion against the covenant with God will come at a cost. If they persist in worshipping false gods and oppressing the poor, then God will use Assyria and subsequently Babylon to judge Jerusalem, to act as a purifying fire to create a new Jerusalem, populated by a remnant that has repented and turned back to God. That's when God's kingdom would come and all nations would flock to Jerusalem to learn about God's justice and bring about a new age of universal peace.

Israel will be cut down like a tree and left like a stump which will be burned. But after all that, this stump will be like a holy seed that will survive into the future.

God will send a new king from David's line, whose name will be called Immanuel, God with us, who will set God's people free from violence and oppression. This king will be a small shoot that will sprout from that old stump. This king will rule over the new Jerusalem and bring justice for the poor and all nations will look to this leader for guidance. This kingdom will transform all creation, bringing God's peace and God's justice to all.

All of this was so that God's blessing and salvation would flow out to all of the nations like God had promised to Abraham (Genesis 12). It was this hope that compelled Isaiah to speak out against all the corruption he saw.

It is only trust in God and repentance that will save Israel. Not violence. So if not violence, what?

That's what I ask myself. What is this king going to offer people that will induce this transformation?

And I find a hint in this passage we heard read today.

"will be like **a hiding-place from the wind,**
a **covert from the tempest,**
like **streams of water in a dry place,**
like the **shade of a great rock in a weary land.**"

What are these descriptions of? **Home.**

The New Jerusalem won't be a shining city on a hilltop; it will be "**will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever.**"

"My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places."

To answer your question: I chose this passage because Mary and Joseph set off on a journey to "**their ancestral hometown.**"

With the natural feelings about home in their hearts and all these teachings about home ringing in their ears they left their home and went to their ancestral hometown.

Mary isn't the only one to give birth when far from home..

Aerial scenes of destruction of whole villages and towns in Myanmar, Syria. To destroy a people, it seems, all you have to do is destroy their homes.

But is it? After hurricanes and fires, people stubbornly refuse to give up, and scenes come to mind of folk clearing away rubble and rebuilding, often with the help of strangers.

A 97 year old relative by marriage lived in Paradise California until the fire destroyed her home. At 97 she is busily looking for a new home.

Recently, Mike Giguere told the Outreach Committee that, in cases of Domestic violence, 75% of the families who use Interval House, return to their homes despite the presence of the abuser. We are that desperate to hold onto a sense of place, of home.

The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned, as Maya Angelou put it.

"a hiding-place from the wind,
a covert from the tempest"

God says,

"I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will *plant* them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more." II Samuel 7.10

God promises to "make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever." II Samuel 7.11

The Compass has asked us to look at the possibility of participating in Neighbourhood Care Network, a program that matches pairs of trained volunteers from churches with a family who need advice, guidance, connection with social services, *help* to avoid sliding into permanent poverty as a result of a sudden catastrophe like death or abandonment.

Last year at this time the police accessed this programme when they found a recent widow living in her car with her two young sons. The first task for the volunteers was to find them a home. Once the home was secured, her team could go to work accessing furniture, connecting them with social assistance and preparing Mum for the workforce. But the first step, was finding them a home.

A family who secretly lived for months in a van found a home for Christmas. Not just a room with walls, but a lifeline to safety, security through the relationship of two members walking alongside them with faith.

Unlike many other refugee sponsors, you had a home to offer your family. For the rest of us, it was one of the hardest tasks, to find them a home. There were so many responses that sounded like, "no room in the inn."

The dreidl, that toy of Channuka, has Hebrew words on it. In Israel, the words translate to, "a miracle happened here." But everywhere else in the world, when Jews spin the dreidl on

Chanukah, the words read, "a miracle happened there." For Jews living outside Israel, there is always a sense that home is far away.

The journey of Mary and Joseph mirrors the journeys of their people into slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness for forty years, into exile in Babylon for 70 years – a people seemingly always on the move and far from home..

Mary and Joseph make that journey and when they arrive at their destination, even then it isn't safe. There is no inn with hosts to serve them, no hot meal, no warmth or cheer. Just a barn with the warmth of animals.

Mary and Joseph find that the manger full of straw is the home they were provided. A temporary home at best. Yet it was sufficient to bring into the world the child of God, a powerful love never to be matched.

It's kind of ironic, that Jesus turned out to be the one who would bring peace and justice to the world, who would give us our permanent home, the only home impervious to fire, flood, destruction..

Mary would follow her son through his life – a life of temporary places, **rejected by his own hometown**, on the move ... until she heard his voice at the foot of the cross:

"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home."

Jesus left his home with God, left his home with Mary, so we could find our home with Him. Wherever we are, whomever we are with, we have a home in Jesus:

"A place of communion and unconditional love. It is where, when you cross its threshold, you finally feel at peace." Dennis Lahan

Jesus is our home; there is no place like home.