

The Favored Chair

Text: Psalm 90: 1-2; Mark 3: 31-35

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I once read an autobiography . . . in which a man told of the extraordinary influence that his mother had in his life; and how, even years after her death, he still longed for her presence.

When she died he made certain to keep her favorite chair, an over-stuffed rocker. He confided that from time to time he would simply sit in that chair because it made him feel just a little bit closer to her across the great divide.

It's a beautiful thought. Just to imagine such a favored chair – a place to reflect and connect to those who have gone before us and to stir-up their presence again in the real-time of now.

Well, what if by some archeological . . . and spiritual mystery someone got their hands on the favorite chair of Jesus - if there could have ever been such a thing? Maybe you can already see where I am going with this!

And what if, by sitting in that chair, we could stir-up more of his insight and what he had to say? Most apropos to Mother's Day: what if we could hear his wisdom about love and the importance of family and relationship and nurture and home?

Though it is true that his teaching on such matters was not direct or identified as such, he did offer a few images and thoughts in varied places from which we might gather an eclectic lesson.

So sitting in that favored chair . . . here's a first thing. It comes first because there is nothing that Jesus talked about more frequently than the power of love.

It pops up in the lines he spoke and in the spaces between lines, too. "Love one another, even as I have loved you." "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." "Love your neighbor as yourself." "Abide in my love."

He did not say so lightly. He knew that real love, the kind of love that sustains our lives, is no simple thing for any of us. It's layered and complicated. It asks us to seek the best for another person – which almost always requires that we get out of our own way.

C.S. Lewis once said: "Love is more than an emotion. It's a decision. It's not just a feeling. It is what we decide to do to each other, and for each other, that love is revealed." Carter Heyward added: "To love requires a conversion to humanity, a willingness to be present, and a commitment to participate with others in the healing of a broken world and our broken lives."

So love is first . . . large as it is. But then Jesus turns us toward the ground beneath us; because to sustain lives of love, let alone homes and families and relationships, requires the consistently hard work of digging footings and laying foundations.

Jesus taught this by parable as he set in contrast solid rock and sinking sand. His point is pretty hard to overlook: that which we create life on, live on, love on needs the steadiness of firm, trustworthy and reliable ground.

You remember the best-selling story of Tuesdays with Morrie in which an elder and dying man, Morrie, was teaching life's lessons to one of his graduate students, Mitch. "Tell me about family?" Mitch prompted. Morrie gestured toward the photos that lined his bookshelves: Morrie with his grandmother; Morrie with his brother; Morrie with his wife; Morrie with his two sons. And then Morrie said, 'The fact is, there is no foundation, no secure ground upon which people may stand today if it isn't family. It's become quite clear to me, as I've been sick. Family and love are supremely important. Without them we are as birds with broken wings.'

So from that favored chair . . . we hear of the importance of love and the essential need for footings and foundations. Naming these things is essential. But we all know, when we get too tight in our definition of anything we must be especially careful.

It's just then that I remember something that Jesus asked his disciples. "Who is my mother, and who are my sisters and brothers?" I wonder if he placed that as a definitional comma, as if he was prompting a larger discussion for all of us?

Because home and family are pretty darn complicated things. It does not take too much digging in any one of our families to find this out. We quickly discover that they go far beyond ancestry and biology, demographic parameters unchanging times.

A Roman Catholic Sister of the Mercy Community once participated with me in a yearlong seminar. As the last session ended she said to all of us who had been a part of it: "I am an only child born of only children. My parents have long since died. There is nowhere - no place - in the world for me to go home to. Long ago I learned to identify my real home not with where I was but who I was with. I learned to ask the question not 'where is home for me?' but 'who is home for me?' And you folks have been my family and my home. In the love of Christ, you have been mine."

A last view from that favored chair . . . signals that the hunger for home and love and family somehow transcend the edges of the mortal life that we know. So I add to the conversation one of the most amazing metaphors that Jesus gave to us, a promise just beyond the bend: "In my Father's house are many rooms."

Years ago we had a family wedding an old mansion in Vermont. It had tunnels beneath it leading to an underground den, an underground observatory and a secret escape. Within the house, there were passageways within the walls – doorways that led to closets that turned to narrow nooks that open to unexpected rooms. During a rather restless part of the evening all of the cousins (including my kids) set out on an exploring expedition. And what an adventure! Because the place just kept getting bigger. It was never as small as they surmised.

Our longing for home is like that. It begs that the places we live in and take nurture from and share family with might be and become, as God's house, always bigger, more expansive, opening growth, yet inviting.

And so from that imagined favored chair . . . the pre-eminence of love, the importance of foundations, the yearning for more inclusive definitions, and the hunger for a place for our hearts that is beyond time and eternal.

May your reflections about such things lead you. And may you be newly aware and grateful today. In the name of the One who is home to us, who is family, who is hope, and who is love. Amen.

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