

A Homily by
The Reverend Jo Popham

“Home...”
Trinity Sunday
May 26, 2013
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Psalm 8
Romans 5:1-5
John 16:12-15

It was after one of our first trips back to the states after moving to Canada to do God’s work among you all – that would be all y’all – that Jim and I waited in the line at customs and immigration with our fellow travelers for some time. But it was worth the wait, because we were greeted by the agent at the desk with these words: “Welcome home!” And we were home. We had made our home here in Calgary, and I had made my home with you here at St. Andrew’s.

For much of my life, I would have said that New Orleans was home. I was born and raised in Louisiana. I went to school there. I went to university there. New Orleans is where I married Jim. It is where the children went to school. But when it ceased to be home, I had no home. Now Calgary is home. Now St. Andrew’s is home. T. S. Eliot said “Home is where one starts from.” And I believe that is exactly right. This week I will start out from here – from home – on a new adventure.

Before I go, I want to leave you with a few more anecdotal Jo stories.

Every place Jim and I have lived we have had our “Roosevelt Island” – that is what we call the place we thought that we would have time to see it, but never got around to it. Roosevelt Island is in the middle of the Potomac River that separates the state of Virginia and Washington, DC. We never made it there. We always thought we would see Calgary by rail, on a transcontinental trip across Canada. But that was not what God had in mind. We have been blessed to see much of the Canadian Rockies, I have checked off bear, elk, mountain goats and mountain sheep, wolf and northern mosquitoes – checked off all the wildlife from the list that I wanted to see here. I have learned to grow and to love rhubarb/strawberry cobbler. I have marveled at the endless fields of golden wheat and bright yellow canola. And I have looked forward to the

blooms of the wild roses every year. But my “Roosevelt Island” in Canada will be the Yukon. I was reading an article this week in the regional magazine *Yukon, North of Ordinary* and found a lovely article on the wild roses in the Yukon that I trust must be quite like our wild prairie roses. I copied the recipes for Wild-Rose Petal Ice Cream and Wild-Rose Petal Healing Ointment. The article and photos were by Beverley Gray, and she says that “We know summer has arrived in the North when we catch the sweet scent of heart-shaped wild-rose petals as it wafts on the boreal breeze, a reminder of the divine essence that surrounds us.” The divine essence that surrounds us. I have felt the divine essence – actually felt the presence of God in Canada – and here in this place. Christ’s presence is palpable. I am sure that you all feel it too. We have shared the sweetness of our Lord with one another by allowing Christ Jesus to act in us and speak through us just as the fragrance of the wild prairie rose wafts through the summer air.

Another story:

On our “southern farewell tour” on our way to Canada, I was having a meal with a dear friend at a favorite restaurant that had reopened, and she said that she hoped that the chaos I had been living since the hurricane was over. I told her “the chaos that is my life began long before Katrina.” She told me that should be the first line of my book. Now I think that I would start the story of my life with “Home is where we start from.” Home is the place where we learned who we are and who we are meant to be. It is the place where we were formed.

St. Andrew’s is where I was formed as a priest. Seminary training, even field work for a couple years was really theoretical, because until I put my training into practice in my own parish I did not grasp what it meant to be ordained. In working with the wardens and lay leadership and the staff at St. Andrew’s I have been formed as a strong servant/shepherd priest. Very close friends have told me that I have always been a priest. In so many ways that may be true, but it is doing ministry with you the people of St. Andrew’s that enabled me to fully grow into a priest. It has been a pleasure to feed you through Word, Sacrament, and fellowship. We have come to know – and love one another – around the Lord’s table, the dinner table, and over coffee and tea. It has been an honour to journey with all y’all through all our life passages: births, baptisms,

confirmations, marriages, illnesses, and new life at the time of death – big sacraments and lesser ones – all sacraments. We have laughed together – a lot, and we have shed tears together. Together we all have grown more fully into who God wants us to be. Working with the young people and seeing God through their eyes has inspired me to seek the innocent logical meanings to many of life’s difficult questions. The youth have also taught me to immerse myself in the pure joy of life. It is the faith of the youngest and the oldest at St. Andrew’s that has touched me most deeply. I have prayed with the dying who even *in extremis* could still recite the prayers as they prepared to see the glory of God. I have had the privilege of feeding some of these dear ones their last meal with holy food from this altar. And I have sung some of them to death with that ancient anthem “Give rest to your servant with all your Saints...where sorrow and pain are no more, neither sighing, but life everlasting.” At the other end of the spectrum, I have watched our children grow in their knowledge and love of God and service to God. I pray they will never recall a time when they were not welcome at church. And I will always be grateful to all the people here who have prompted me to grow in my own personal faith.

Yet another story:

When my oldest child first went off the university, she called to talk often. She wasn’t so much lonely as she was anxious to share new things she had learned – about herself, about new friends, and sometimes even about her chosen field of study. One time she called crying because she was hurting for some of her new friends. She said: “Mama, many of the young women here are alone for the first time. They are away from family and friends, away from home for the first time – away from everyone who loves them, and they don’t even know that God loves them.” I pray that you all know that God loves you and that God all people. And, I pray, that God – in God’s wisdom – sent me to you so that you would know that you are loveable, that God loves you and that I love you. But also that God loves all of creation. Out of an abundance of love we – and all that is – were created. And one of the reasons that I believe God sent me to you was so that together we could come to know God more, to love and trust God better, so that we could serve God more and better.

You all must have wondered why God had sent you this woman who spoke with a strange accent and told stories that didn't have much to do with Canadian life. But I trust that the Bishop's office was wise in sending me to you 4 1/2 years ago. You all really must have thought: "what in the world do we have in common – this woman from the deep South who still has the South in her mouth?" I had made my home in Louisiana, for goodness sake. I had been formed in a home so very different from Alberta. What could I possibly in common with people from the "Heart of the New West?" I will tell you, the Lord God. We have God and God's love in common, the love that Stacy's new friends did not know. But y'all know.

Every week I have spoken to you in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you could reduce all my sermons to one sentence, I think it likely would be that God loves all people. And that love always has been and will be forever. I myself hear this message everywhere: in scripture, in other preachers' sermons, in our conversations during coffee hour, in the questions our young people ask during confirmation class and at children's time. I even hear the same message on the Internet. Everyday I get several different messages from Christian list-services. My favorite right now is from the Society of St. John the Evangelist – an order that several of you belong to. Last week Brother Mark Brown's message was spot on:

"If Christ is in me and Christ is in you, we have something in common. We are no longer separate. We are no longer separated by so many miles—or by race or class or disease. We have something of our essence in common."

And we always will. So I will be leaving home this week, but I will take you with me. You have formed me in my northern home. And I will carry you and your ministry to me and with me – always – wherever I go because we have God's love in common.

Lord, may it be so.

Amen.