

“Nomad Land”

Sermon on Sunday, June 26, 2022

In the 2020 movie, *Nomad Land*, Frances McDormand plays a widow who has lost her job security and is living in a group of people who are drifting from place to place out west. At one point, a young girl meets her in the local laundromat and asks, “My mom says that you are homeless. Is that true?” And she responds with the utmost honesty and grace, “No, I’m just houseless, that’s not the same thing, right?” It’s a very powerful exchange because the actress exudes dignity and warmth; it rubs off on the little girl. The message that I hear between the lines is: some people who own houses may in fact be homeless because they are not really at home where they are in their life. And some people who have no place they own may well be at home in a community. The drifters to which the woman belongs provide a homey feeling and a sense of freedom amidst all the hardships that must be embraced when people live outside of mainstream conveniences.

I was reminded of that scene when I read today’s passage from the gospel of Luke in which Jesus utters the famous words, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Yes, it would be a correct reading of the gospels to place Jesus closer to the nomads in the movie that I just mentioned than to most of us mortgage paying people. Jesus embraced a lifestyle of being on the move. It was part of his mission, a demonstration of his belief that God can’t be confined to one particular place, not even a church or a shrine, and not even our favorite image or theology of God. That may be a bit hard to swallow for people who value security, safety and being settled. That’s me and you, right? But it’s not a criticism of our settled lifestyle, at least that’s not how I hear it. It’s just how Jesus needed and wanted to live: without being tied down to one place, without a permanent structure, open to meet people in a number of different places. He was a nomad, houseless but not homeless.

Perhaps some of you feel uneasy about that. If Jesus chose that transient life, isn’t there an inherent criticism of our life style with houses and homes, two or three door garages, a yard, a garden, a dog and a basketball hoop? And again, I want to say, “No, it’s how

Jesus needed and wanted to live.” He visited the homes of many people, but to my knowledge he never criticized them for having or owning one. To me, the lessons learned from this and other radical passages of the gospels, which aren’t reflecting our way of life is this: an appreciation for people who don’t fit into the regular norms of society, who refuse to be tied to one place. If Jesus lived like that, perhaps they too are more than just “homeless.” Perhaps they are just houseless and have something to teach us. And also: we must be careful with status symbols, as if they could truly tell who we are.

But there is even more to this gospel lesson. The key to understanding some of Jesus’ harsh rhetoric a la, “the dead will bury their own dead,” is in the first verse. We cannot understand Christ without the introduction to this passage, the very beginning. Luke writes, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” In other words, the wandering period was over, the time of asking people to follow him was over, the teaching years were over, and at this point he is openly discouraging people from joining his group because what was in store for him in Jerusalem would not be so nice. Sometimes you have to discourage people from their enthusiasm and excitement for their own good, and I believe that’s what Jesus does here as people come and want to join him. “Foxes have dens and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

Was Jesus afraid as he set out “resolutely” for Jerusalem? We don’t know. The gospels don’t give us much insight into the emotional life of Christ. Occasionally they do. But it is clear that Jesus had a sense of destiny, and he didn’t complain about it even when the cross began to loom large. To me, that singlemindedness in the face of life and of death is something to be admired. There are things in all of our lives that we can’t change or run away from, even if we try. There are hardships in our lives that we simply have to deal with. It may be the early loss of a child; it may have to do with illness or deep hurt in a relationship. We can’t run away from it. Those who have a spiritual home, an inner place of calm, a sense of being surrounded by more than what the eye can see and the ear can hear, those who are at home in God have an easier time to accept the journey for better or for worse. That’s what I hear in the gospel reading for today and maybe it speaks to

some of you. We have a house of God here in this church. But more important is: we have a home, an eternal home and it's not somewhere in heaven, it is right here where we are and at the same time, far beyond. Aren't we all nomads in this life, travelers, sojourners, on our way to an eternal home? And so, whatever life has in store for you, good or bad or ugly, embrace the journey and trust that the Lord is walking with you through your nomad land. **Amen.**