

“Finding Home”

2nd sermon in a series based on ‘The Wiz’

I John 4:4

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Home. That place of belonging.

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

I grew up learning the words to a song. The song didn’t have power until I moved away from home, first to Washington, D.C., then a small town in Georgia, then Central America. From there, up to the Bay area of San Francisco. Then my years of wandering ended as I settled in Seattle, Washington for almost 2 decades. It’s a place with cool breezes, low humidity and the smell of the sea. A place that was home. Still, when I would travel over the mountains to Eastern Washington, the words to the song that I learned as a child would find their way back into my thoughts. You see, Eastern Washington state is a land cut off from the ocean air by the mountains, a land with the smell of earth and farming. The song that found its way to me when I traveled to that land ended with the words “When I dream about the moonlight on the Wabash, then I long for my Indiana home.”

Over the last few years, another has replaced that song of my childhood. Now in this place where my kids have spent their transition years from children to adults, the words to the song that comes to mind more? Well, you all know the words. Could we sing the chorus together?

Weep no more my lady.

Oh! Weep no more today!

We will sing one song

For my old Kentucky home

For the old Kentucky home, far away.

The first two weekends in July, Woodland Park’s stage was home to the play ‘The Wiz’, which gave me the idea to dig out the book “The Gospel According to the Wiz” by Otis Moss III, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. Last Sunday and today the book has been a springboard for our sermon themes. And what I said last week applies this week as well: You don’t have to have seen the play ‘The Wiz’, knowledge of the classic ‘The Wizard of Oz’ should be sufficient to follow along.

We know that in both play and movie Dorothy has landed in Oz and it trying to get back home. “There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home.”

Do you remember the description of Oz from last week? I mentioned that, when we think of Oz, more than likely our thoughts automatically jump to that *place* in ‘The Wiz’ or the more well known ‘Wizard of Oz’. You know, the land that Dorothy and Toto all of a sudden find themselves dropped into with a yellow brick road, munchkins, a talking scarecrow, tin man, lion,

flying monkeys and a seemingly mighty wizard. According to Moss, and what we most likely know deep inside, the Land of Oz isn't real. Nor is it a make believe land. Rather than a physical place, the book 'The Gospel According to the Wiz' suggests that it's a state of mind. From the book, "Whenever a storm upends your life, you are living in Oz. Whenever you lose a loved one, or a job, or are in transition from one life experience to another, when things seem more than a bit real or strange or out of the ordinary way of your life, your world or even the political climate, you are in an Oz state of mind.

Last week I asked the question, what do we do when we find ourselves in Oz. In a state of mind where the ground seems to be moving, day to day reality is in flux, life is disorienting. How do we find our way home?

Maya Angelou writes, "The ache for home lives in all of us." If we think of Oz as a state of mind rather than a place, can we define home in the same way?

Can home be a state of mind as well? Or perhaps better put, a state of the heart? A quote from an anonymous writer speaks to this with the words, "Home isn't where you're from, it's where you find light when all grows dark."

It's that inner place of groundedness when the world seems to be spinning all around. That place within, where you find yourself centered, know yourself and, from a faith perspective, know to whom you belong. To quote the chorus from a favorite hymn, "No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that Rock I'm clinging. Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?"

When we put on our faith lenses, we see the word 'home' not necessarily as a place of belonging, but as a state of belonging, knowing that as is written in I John, we come from God and belong to God. We have already won a big victory over those false teachers, wizards in the land of Oz, for the Spirit in us grounds us in the reality that we belong to God.

What do we do when we find ourselves in Oz, in that state of mind when all seems strange or dark or out of our norm? We remember who we are and whose we are.

Anne Lamott is one of my all time favorite authors. She's so down to earth and grounded in her faith. As an illustration, she recently said, "I didn't need to understand the hypostatic unity of the Trinity; I just needed to turn my life over to whoever came up with redwood trees."

In her book; Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith, Lamott writes of a conversation she had with a friend from her church one day. She says to the friend, "I'm all over the place, up and down, scattered, withdrawing, trying to find some elusive sense of serenity." (In other words, she is in Oz and trying to find her way home.)

Her friend tells her, "The world can't give that serenity. The world can't give us peace. We can only find it in our hearts."

To which, in Anne Lamott fashion, she answers her friend, "I hate that."

And her friend replies, "I know. But the good news is that by the same token, the world can't take it away."

Home. That sense of belonging. For many of us, when we walk into these doors we are home. Partly because of this place, but I would imagine mostly because here we are reminded again and again that we belong, that we are loved by a God who calms our storms.

In the final scene of both the Wizard of Oz and the Wiz, each of Dorothy's travel companions get what they were searching for; the Scarecrow a brain, the Tin Man, a heart, the Lion, courage. But then the great and mighty Wizard, who we find out is not really so great and mighty, leaves town before getting Dorothy her wish to go home.

In the movie, 'The Wiz', this is the time when the Glenda, the Good Witch of the South appears, played by Leena Horn.

Dorothy begs her, " Please, is there a way for me to get home?"

The Good Witch Glenda responds, " Oh Dorothy, you were wise and good enough to help your friends find what was within themselves all along. That's true for you also."

Dorothy, bewildered, asks, "Home, inside me?"

And the Good Witch responds, "Home is a place where we all must find, child. It's not just a place where we eat or sleep. Home is knowing. Knowing your mind. Knowing your heart. Knowing your courage. If we know ourselves, we're always home. Anywhere."

And I add, "If we know to whom we belong and then, we can believe in ourselves and find home."