

Home! The very word evokes feelings of love and laughter, security and serenity, warmth and welcome. It means mom and dad, fun and games, good food, deep sleep. “Home, sweet home!” “Home, home on the range.” “When Johnnie comes marching home.” But a young girl from Kansas once said it best, “There’s no place like home!” Easter means **we** are going home!

Let’s unpack this promise, because since the middle of March we have all more or less been **stuck** AT HOME! Most of you are worshipping on Easter morning right now FROM HOME! And for at least the next three weeks, it looks like we’ll be doing more of the same: Quarantined at home! So, what’s so big and impressive and meaningful about the fact that Easter means we are going home? Well, it’s this: Although our houses and apartments and rooms truly are blessings from God, and let’s be honest there are worse places where we could be quarantined like a dorm room, an army barracks, or even a cheap motel room.

But even our earthly dwellings, as nice as they may be, are really not our **true** home. As believers in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, **Heaven** is our home. “I’m but a stranger here, Heaven is my home”, is how Thomas Taylor so beautifully says it in his hymn (LSB 748). Heaven is our home! That’s the blessed good news that keeps us going day after day, especially during days like these! “In My Father’s house are many mansions;” Jesus said, “if it were not so, I would have told you. I go and prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

We rely on God promises just like the Israelite exiles in the book of Isaiah. And there’s a lot from God’s Word that applies to our lives today as we find ourselves as exiles in many way: We are exiled away from many of the places we want to be, including being all together in this Sanctuary this Easter morning.

Throughout the season of Lent and now wrapping things up this morning, we’ve been focusing on God’s promises through the prophet Isaiah to the Israelites living in Babylon in the sixth century BC. And these exiles are far away from their **earthly** home. A terrible reality called Babylon was a fire-breathing monster that devastated everything. In 587, the empire decided once and for all to destroy Jerusalem, described in the Babylonian archives as “a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and a place of rebellion from ancient times” (Ezra 4:15).

Now in refugee camps, Judeans are stuck in a land with canals and ziggurats and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the Ishtar Gate and the detestable statue of Marduk. Judah and Jerusalem and the Jordan have been replaced by

the building projects of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. Judeans have no king, no temple, no royal city, no land, no sacrifice, no hope, and no future. “There *is* no place like home!”

The exiles are far away from home but, more pressing, they are far away from the Father. Just like the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15, Israelites demanded their fair share of the inheritance, set off for a distant country, and squandered it all on wild living. The list is long and ugly: worshiping false gods, perverting justice and righteousness, worthless (half-hearted) worship, false faith. On August 19, 587 BC Jerusalem was destroyed. It was the day the music died!

Most of us may not be very far from our homes right now, but all of us are far away from God the Father, when it comes to His holiness. It’s the way we operate. Like the prodigal son, through our own sinful desires, we demand our fair share of the inheritance and set off for distant, seductive, deadly lights. We sell our baptismal promises—for what? Duplicious lives, empty relationships, and inflated egos. Then Satan plants his foot on our necks and shouts, “God is finished with you!”

But God speaks to exiles! “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12).

Just when the music had died and Israel’s history seemed closed and controlled by hopeless Babylonian imperial policy, to the shock and surprise of everyone the Lord stirs up His messiah Cyrus who defeats Babylon and then releases (releases!) the exiles. A Servant is wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds (by His wounds!) we are healed. The climax of Isaiah’s program in chapters 40–55 is God’s promise to bring the exiles home.

Standing behind this promise is God’s almighty Word. Earlier Isaiah wrote, “The word of our God stands forever” (40:8). Now the Lord promises that this same Word will never return empty. God said it. That settles it. Faith believes it!

In Bethlehem this powerful Word took on flesh and blood, and He has a heart. Jesus knows the bitter pain of exile. He was far away from home (“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head” [Luke 9:58]); but, more pressing, He was far away from the Father. Jesus was betrayed, spit upon, and scourged. Stretched out upon the

cross, He cries out, “My God, My God. Why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). It was the day the music died.

Yet bodily raised on the third day, the song—check that—the grand symphony of celebration, sounds forth most triumphantly! (John 1:4; 6:35; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 20:31)! He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

Easter means we are going home! And God welcomes us with open arms just like the forgiving father welcomed home his prodigal son! Because Jesus lives, we shall live also. Because Jesus rose, we shall rise also on the last day. And He will take us home, to the New Jerusalem, where there will be no pain, no tears, no unemployment, no worries about money, no cancer, no Coronavirus, no sickness, no depression, no death, no end!

Jesus promises, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go and prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). This is no dorm room or army barracks. This is not an Econo Lodge either. It is infinitely better! This is **heaven**! This is being in God’s presence forever! This is rejoicing to be with our fellow believers for eternity!

“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12).

And our response? We sing an endless Hallelujah. Why? We are going home! Amen.

He is Risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!