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“When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there” (Matt 13:53).

One of the underlying themes of the Bible and, for that matter, much of literature, is the search for a home. The Earth itself was created to give us a home. Sin has the effect of exiling us from that home, whether it is a place or an inner space where we find refuge.

Salvation history begins with Abram departing his ancestral home to seek a new home. His descendants end up as slaves in Egypt, are liberated to wander in the desert until they settle again, but soon they are in exile in Babylon. To be homeless is to be unsettled and insecure, longing for return, on edge and left to ponder the dream of coming home again.

Exodus 40 describes how Moses made a portable dwelling place for God, the one reassurance that made the Hebrews' long sojourn tolerable. God was with them, providing for and preparing them to enter a promised land that would be their new home. Their longing for stability was so deep that it became part of the covenant code that they would always welcome alien residents and strangers because they themselves had endured the same suffering.

Jesus' life was that of a refugee, beginning with his family's flight into Egypt when Herod sought to kill him. Jesus was driven out of Nazareth at the start of his ministry, and his life from then on appears to be on the road, escaping north to avoid Herod after the death of John the Baptist, or timing his journey south to Jerusalem to avoid detection until his "hour" had come and he was ready to confront his critics and complete his mission.

When a man asked if he could follow him, Jesus said that "foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to rest his head." He was an outcast. As a traveling teacher, Jesus seems to dwell most in his message, drawing the crowds into his parables as a momentary suspension of their daily struggles, holding them enthralled with images of God's love. When he left, the spell was broken, and he was back on the road, next stop Golgotha, where he would be ejected from this world on the cross.

John Foley's song "Dwelling Place" urges us to pray that Christ will "find a dwelling place of faith in our hearts." It invites us to find our home by being God's home. It is beautiful thought, that we can welcome a homeless, outcast God into our lives. Jesus promises us that to welcome a stranger is to welcome him. What more compelling call can we have to open our lives to others?

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