

## Coming Home For Christmas – Pt.2

[slide 1, blank] [singing] “It’s the most wonderful time of the year!” So says the songwriter about Christmas.

Christmas time is filled with many great symbols – wreaths, trees with lights, nativity scenes.

But the one symbol that seems to capture the emotions of Christmas better than any other is the symbol of home [slide 2, run video, “O there’s no place like home for the holidays”].

Despite SARS CoV-2, and travel restrictions that make it difficult, if not impossible, to be with family this X’mas, [slide 3] I want us to focus on the symbol of home this X’mas.

Speaking of home, “Knock, knock.” [Whose there?] “Owl.” [Owl who?] [singing] “Owl be home for Christmas.”

People will go through much effort, expense, and hassle to get home for Christmas.

What’s so special about being home for Christmas?

When home is working right (and granted, a lot of people did not grow up in a home that worked right) it is a place

of comfort and security,  
of understanding and acceptance,  
of laughter and nurturing,  
of forgiveness and healing,  
of growth and encouragement,  
of hope and love.

In Ps. 90, Moses uses the imagery of home when talking about God.

[slide 4] He writes in v.1: “LORD, through all the generations, you have been our home.” (NLT)

In other words, God is the place where we find comfort and security, understanding and acceptance,

forgiveness and healing, hope and love. Being with God is where we belong; it's home.

[slide 5, blank] If you're a believer, you know that to be true. But did you know that once you've come home to God, he gives you an assignment?

Your assignment is to point the way home to others, others who are wandering away from home, like sheep without a shepherd.

People have been wandering from being at home in God, for centuries.

In the prophet Jeremiah's day God asked, “How long will you wander before you come home?” 31.22 (NCV)

And so, our assignment in life is to point people to home; to show them the way home to God.

Jesus says, “Go everywhere and announce the Message of God's good news (of how you can come home to God) to one and all” Mk. 16.15 (MSG).

I'd like to share with you a story of a man who took his assignment to point people home to God seriously.

[slide 6] His name was Bill. In a lot of ways Bill was just your average guy.

He worked as a financial consultant. It was a good job that paid a reasonable salary. He lived in a middle-class neighbourhood.

[slide 7, blank] Bill didn't have any theological degrees, but he'd always been so grateful to God for forgiving him his sins and receiving him into his forever family.

And he made the most of his opportunities to tell others about how he came home to God through Jesus.

Bill died, and his funeral was packed with hundreds of people.

During the service attendants put microphones out in the aisles of the sanctuary as the pastor stood and said,

“If you are a believer because God used Bill to bring you the good news – if you came home to God like the lost son who came home to his father – come up to one of the mics and tell us your story.

People started standing up all over the sanctuary and moved out into the aisles to the microphones.

One person told how Bill had driven into downtown Chicago to do some business.

[slide 8] A panhandler – a homeless man named Robert – came up to Bill looking for spare change.

Bill said, “How ‘bout I take you to lunch?” So, Robert went with Bill to MacDonald’s, and Bill started to get to know Robert.

[slide 9, blank] By the time the meal is over, Bill said to Robert, “Christmas is coming soon. Why don’t you come to my house and celebrate with us?”

Bill gave him bus fare and left. On Dec. 25 he went to the bus station to pick up Robert. The bus arrived. Robert didn’t.

Did Bill throw up his arms and say, “Oh well, I tried.” No. He got into his car, drove downtown, and goes from bar to bar looking for Robert.

He kept searching for him until finally he found Robert asleep on a park bench lying in his own excrement.

Bill picked him up, cleaned him up, put him in his car and drove him to his home where they celebrated Christmas.

During the celebrations Bob said to him, “Robert, you’re made in the image of God. He cares for you. He wants you to come home to him.”

Robert said, “I’d love to know this God of yours.” They prayed and that day Robert came home to God.

The whole encounter seemed to have been divinely orchestrated because just a few days later Robert died.

But Robert was home; he came home to God because a guy named Bill made most of the opportunities he had

to tell others the good news; how people can cease their wandering and come home to God.

Bill acted a lot like our heavenly Father. In fact, there are three ways Bill acted like our heavenly Father, three ways we can also act this Christmas season.

(What then, is the 1<sup>st</sup> way we can act like our heavenly Father?) [**slide 10**]

**1. Maintain a great love for people who are spiritually lost.**

Our heavenly Father is like that. [**slide 11**] Paul writes in Eph. 2.4-5: “But because of his **great love** for us,

God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you are saved.”

[**slide 12, blank**] God’s love for us is great; it is abundant and plenteous.

Bill experienced that great love of God and showed it to others.

I admit there are times when I don’t always show that same love for people. What about you?

Do you know someone who is spiritually lost, wandering like a sheep without a shepherd, yet can be so hard to love that, at times, you feel like giving up on them?

If so, we need to ask God to pour out his love afresh into our hearts that we might love people who are lost, wandering like sheep without a shepherd, so that they might come home to God.

(What then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> way we can act like our heavenly Father?) [slide 13]

## 2. Meet people's material needs in Jesus' name.

Our heavenly Father met the material, physical needs of people. He didn't just say he loved the world he showed it.

He showed the fullest extent of his love by sending his one and only Son, Jesus, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

In Jesus we see God's love in action in the gospel stories where he feeds and heals people.

[slide 14] Jesus says to us in Mt. 5.16: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may **see your good works** and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (ESV).

The light we have to shine is the light of Christ. He is the light of the world who lives in us.

[slide 15, blank] As we live for Christ, and do our good works in his name, we shine like lights, showing others who are groping in darkness the way home to God.

Meeting people's material needs in Jesus' name – showing God's love in action – letting our light shine –

is another way we can act like our heavenly Father.

As we meet people this Christmas season we can ask ourselves, “Do they have a material need I can meet in Jesus’ name?”

What about the person who’s in financial difficulty?

You can give them a Christmas card that talks about the love of God, but why not include a gift card to Walmart.

Don’t sign the card. Don’t put a return address on the envelope. Just mail it anonymously.

Or, do up your own box of groceries or gifts or both for a family you now that’s in need.

Take the box to their door, set it down, ring the bell, and run! It’s fun!

If they’re in an apartment, make arrangements with someone who lives there to deliver it for you.

Again, include a card. Don’t sign it, just say, “This is from Jesus.”

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may **see your good works** and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

(What then, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> way we can act like our heavenly Father?) [**slide 16**]

### **3. Make the most of your opportunities to point people home to God.**

Our heavenly Father made the most of his opportunities to point people home to himself

through his message given to the prophets and the apostles and ultimately through his Son, our Saviour, Jesus.

We can be like our heavenly Father [**slide 17**] by doing what Paul says in Col. 4.5:

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”

In other words, make the most of your opportunities to tell others the Good News.

Something we can all do this Christmas season is to pray, asking God to give us opportunities to

tell others the good news that a Saviour has been born and his name is Jesus, the Messiah.

Then ask God for the courage to follow through when the opportunities come.

[**slide 18**] When your talking with your friends, relatives, associates, or neighbours, it may be something as simple as inviting them to the Christmas Eve service.

“By the way, if you’re not doing anything Christmas Eve, we’re having a Candlelight Service at our church. I’d love for you to come.”

To make it even easier for you, we’ve provided an invitation for you which you can pick up at the Welcome Centre on your way out this morning.

You can make the most of your opportunities to give them out to people.

When you leave the restaurant, leave an invitation on the table.

When the postal worker delivers the mail leave an invitation by the box for him or her.

When your kids give a Christmas card to their teacher at school include an invitation.

Ask God for opportunities to tell others the good news; to point them home to God. We can all do this. It's not rocket science.

People have a longing to be home; a longing they can't always articulate. We can help them fulfill that longing

by making the most of our opportunities to tell others the Good News – that through Jesus, people can find their way home to God.

If you know for sure that you are home with God, then this Christmas,

- ◆ maintain a great love for people who are spiritually lost,
- ◆ do what you can to meet their material needs, and
- ◆ make the most of your opportunities to tell them the Good News

so you they can find their way home to God through Christ.

If you are not sure you are home with God but you want to be, pray with me right now. "Jesus, I admit I'm like a sheep without a shepherd.

I've been wandering but now I want to come home; home to my heavenly Father.

So I turn to you now and ask you to forgive me my sins and restore me to yourself; bring me home to my heavenly Father."

Song: 436 / 590 – Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling.

Closing prayer: Heavenly Father, may we seize the moment this Christmas to be like you, so that people can find their way home to you.

Use our ordinary lives to fulfill your extraordinary plan to bring people home to you. In Jesus name we ask. Amen.