

There is something very unnatural about not being home for Christmas, isn't there. This is the first year in 23 years that I have not been close to my family members in Michigan. The usual Schulz Christmas is taking place at my sisters house in Detroit. My sister Susan and Mary are probably preparing a Christmas ham for lunch. It seems a bit strange to be down here alone away from family in Florida. But at least my real family is here. My daughter is here from LA, my potential son-in-law is here, my wife is here, and my dog Brodie is close by. If those people wouldn't be around, something would definitely be missing at Christmas. It's curious when you think about it. Most people plan to be any place but home on other major holidays. People go south for Easter, north for the Fourth of July, anywhere on Labor Day. But Christmas is different, isn't it? People fly across the country or drive half the night through snowstorms to be home for Christmas.

It's rather ironic when you read the account of the Christmas story in the Bible, because what you find when you read the story carefully is that no one was home at the first Christmas. Mary and Joseph weren't home. Their home was Nazareth, and they found themselves in Bethlehem. The shepherds weren't home. They had to work that night out in the fields. The Wise Men from the East weren't home. They traveled a great distance. In a real way, Jesus the Christ child, was very far from home.

Our text from John today reminds us that Jesus voluntarily left the security and splendors of his home in heaven in order to carry out his mission here on earth. He was a long way from home. Jesus, also called the Word in our lesson, Was, "Away From Home So We Could Be At Home!"

Have you ever tried to define what home really means? Think back to the Christmas's of our youth. If you need help, I'll bet there was probably a sense of belonging. We knew that we sort of fit in our home. We knew our place with our brothers and sisters. We had a sense of attachment to our parents and our grandparents, a sense of relational warmth and connectiveness. So for many of us, home is about belonging, belonging to people who love us.

What else comes to mind when you think of home? Wouldn't a sense of security be right up there? A true home is a safe place. A true home is a place of comfort and protection from outside forces. A true home is a familiar place. It's a predictable environment where certain family traditions provide a sense of stability, especially around Christmas. That's where all the traditions and the rituals happen, right?

You remember some of your Christmas rituals. Maybe you were a real-tree family, or maybe you were fake-tree people. Maybe you opened your presents on Christmas Eve—or you opened them on Christmas morning like you should. Maybe your Christmas dinner happened on Christmas Eve—or no Christmas Day like it ought to.

But those and a host of other family rituals were a whole lot more important than you realized as a child because they gave you an underlying sense of security in your home. That's an essential ingredient in what home is about. Home has something to do with a sense of belonging, and it has something to do with a sense of security.

But what does living in the real world do to our understanding of home over time? That's right, in time, this sense of belonging and security is shattered. Parents split up. You weren't banking on that. Marriages break up. That wasn't the plan either. You have a falling out with your mom or dad. You aren't speaking to them anymore. Loved ones

leave or die. And somewhere along life's journey, that strong sense of belonging and security weakens and crumbles.

Can I bring it down to the personal level? Some of you thought that this Christmas was just going to be just like the last five or ten Christmases, but it didn't turn out that way, did it? For some of you there is a husband missing this Christmas, there's a mother who isn't around this year. There's the piercing pain of a recent death. Yes, we can really see how tenuous our earthly relationships are. We have a deep need for a permanent sense of security and sense of belonging.

And so at Christmas, we gather in front of a nativity scene. We see loving people huddled around a baby in a wooden manger, and we wonder if maybe God's son, the Christmas child, will be able to address those needs in a permanent and perfect way. Let me assure you Jesus has done just that. He has the power. Our text says that Jesus, the Word, was involved in the making of this universe. "All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made." We say that God created all things. Yes, but he created them through his son who was the Word. Jesus created the blue heavens above. Jesus scooped out the rivers and lakes and oceans and filled them with water. Jesus put the sun and the moon and the stars where they are. Jesus put the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, and the animals on the land. God was the source of creation but Jesus was the instrument which brought to pass all that we see in the world. Can Jesus give us the sense of belonging and security in life that we crave. You'd better believe He can. For Jesus is eternal and has great power.

The Bible says that God knows you. He knows your name. It's been on his lips 10,000 times, and it was on his lips again today. God thought about you several times today, and God knows your needs. He knows that you have a deep need for a lasting sense of security. He knows that about you. He also knows that earthly relationships are vulnerable and only meet that belonging need in a partial way.

And so God says to each of us this Christmas, I know you matter to me, and through the Christ child, my son Jesus Christ, I will make a way for you to belong to me permanently. Through Jesus's redeeming work on the cross, God says, "My son will pave the way for repentant people like you to become members of my family, my eternal family, and once you're adopted into my family, you will belong to me throughout this life and on through eternity, and nothing and no one will be ever able to break the bonds of belonging.

Jesus may seem far off when we think of Him as being in the beginning with God. He may seem far off when we think of him as creating all things. But that Word drew very close to us when he became flesh. Especially at Christmas time do we hear men telling why they think Jesus came into the world. Some say that He came to bring peace to the nations. If that is so, His coming was a failure, because we have never had peace upon the earth. Some say that He came to set an example of brotherly love for us, teaching us to do kind things for others. Some say that He came to establish the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God upon the earth. Oh, why do men get so far away from God's Word? The greatest verse in the Bible tells us why he came, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. That's why he came. Oh, how the world need to see this great truth today. Men are lost, they are dead in trespasses and sin. How can they find life? Not through church membership or church ceremonies or good

works. True life is found in Christ. No wonder John says, "In Him was life and the life was the light of men." There is no life in any other. The one who created all life in the first place is the only one who can give us a meaningful and lasting life. Listen to Acts 4:12 "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Jesus has made it possible that we can have a peaceful life. We don't have to be looking over our shoulder wondering whether God will punish us for our sins when we die. We have peace knowing that God is our friend once again. Wonderful blessings are showered down on us as Christians. Galatians 5:2 says "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

As we contemplate this Christmas message once again, God is calling us to trust the fantastic story before us. We are asked to believe that this whole Christmas thing is real and true. That God did visit this planet earth in the form of Jesus Christ. That Jesus was born miraculously to two Jewish peasants and grew up in a blue collar town. That at the age of 30 he began a public ministry where he healed, challenged, and comforted people, and at the end of that ministry shouldered the sins of the world as he hung on that cross between 2 common criminals. And after 3 days he rose from the dead, later ascended, and from that time until now is reaching out to fallen wayward people all over the world, offering them a new start, a more satisfying life, a more secure future. Do you believe this? It is a lot to believe. Do you believe it enough to stake everything on it. Do you believe it enough to spread the words of this story to everyone who crosses your path, or is it a battle for us to trust all this? The Bible says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you as well." Are you willing to put this Jesus first in your life? My friends, if you do, you will be grateful for having done so everyday in your life. For He will take care of all your needs.

Jesus, the Word, is bigger than any problem you have. He is stronger than any force that's facing you now, and he's standing by willing and eager to apply his power to your situation and, need I remind you, you belong to him. You're secure in his care. With his power, you can look into the future with a sense of optimism. You can move forward into your future with faith and not fear.

We Christians are optimists, even in the middle of uncertain times. That's why Paul once said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain, which just means Paul saying, "I'm confident that Christ will supply me with whatever I need to face any problem this life throws at me, and when this life ends, I'll spend eternity in the very presence of God the Father.

So its a win-win deal. The promise of help in his life and the promise of heaven in the next, and that sense of optimism that makes us feel like we're home.

Look at the irony will you? The Son of God, the creator of the universe, leaves his home, he's born a homeless person in a temporary shelter, he identifies with the homeless all throughout his ministry, he's buried in a borrowed grave, and yet, through his death and resurrection, he enables all wandering people who receive him to recapture a sense of home in this life, recapture a sense of belonging, a sense of security, and beyond that, he promises a permanent home in heaven forever.

Yes, I want to come home for the holidays. With Jesus I am home, no matter where I am located in this world. Yes, Jesus went Away from Home so we could be at Home with God. All praise and glory, to Christ, the Word Become Flesh!