St. Andrew's By-the-Sea

The Episcopal Church in Destin, Florida

THE NINETEETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

OCTOBER 19, 2025

A Homily by the Rev. Jo P. Popham

"Home"
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son, And Holy Spirit.
The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Look upon the church gathered in prayer, and grant that we, like your people (in Israel and Gaza), may grow in the service of goodness and prevail over the evil that holds the world bound, as we await the coming of that hour when you will grant justice to your chosen ones, who cry to you day and night. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **Amen**.[1]

For the last five years, Jim and I have made our home with you all, here at St. Andrew's By-the-Sea, and here in Destin, Florida, the luckiest fishing village, a true home to 13,000ish people, and visited by millions each year. In times past home was where I fell in love with Jim, where he asked me to marry him more than four decades ago. Home was where the children went to school. And there was a time when we had no home after Hurricane Katrina, and we wandered for 22 months imposing on people who loved us in their homes. Until Tuesday this will be our home… Destin and St. Andrew's By-the-Sea. T. S. Eliot said "Home is where one starts from." And I believe that is exactly right. This week I will start out from here – from home – on a new adventure.

Before we go I want to leave you with a few more anecdotal Jo stories.

Every place Jim and I have lived we have had our "Roosevelt Island" – that is what we call the place we thought that we would have time to see it, but never got around to it. Roosevelt Island is in the middle of the Potomac River that separates the state of Virginia and Washington, DC. We never made it there. And we never got to organize and take a Tiki Cruise to Crab Island. We have watched hundreds of boats – including at least a few Tiki boats – gather there in the evenings, but we never got together with friends at Crab

Island. But we have watched our share of sunsets from the beaches here in Destin. We have marveled at the beautiful colors God paints every night as the sun sets.

Another story: We were having dinner with a dear friend at a favorite restaurant in New Orleans that had just reopened. Her house was not so far from ours, but we were in the bottom of the bowl, and hers was on a ridge just beyond us. She said that she hoped that the chaos I had been living since the hurricane was over. I told her "the chaos that is my life began long before Katrina." She told me that should be the first line of my book. Now I think that I would start the story of my life with "Home is where we start from." Home is the place where we learned more and more who we are and who we are meant to be. It is the place where we were formed and reformed and transformed. Working with you all, I have learned to trust the leadership of the church entirely. You all have chosen really solid Christian people to serve on the several vestries Jim and I have worked with. Together we have faced obstacles that most churches and their vestries never experience – not the least of which is selling our all the church's property and being without a home. Through the ups and downs of parish life together we have laughed – a lot, and we have shed tears together. Together we all have grown more fully into who God wants us to be.

One of our favorite commentators, William Barclay has said that "the Christian should have only one ambition--to be of use to the Church of which he is a part and the society in which he lives."[2] I am so proud to have worked with people who for so many years have fulfilled their calling to be of use to that part of society that we live among – the homeless of Destin. The Blue Door was a model of how to care for our neighbors who are hungry and those who are hungry and have no home. Thank you for teaching me to do this.

Yet another story:

When our oldest child first went off the university, she called to talk often. She wasn't so much lonely as she was anxious to share new things she had learned – about herself, about new friends, and sometimes even about her chosen field of study. One time she called crying because she was hurting for some of her new friends. She said: "Mama,

many of the young women here in the dorm are alone for the first time. They are away from family and friends, away from home for the first time – away from everyone who loves them, and they don't even know that God loves them." I pray that you all know that God loves you and that God loves all people. And, I pray, that God – in God's wisdom – sent me to you so that you would know that you are loveable, that God loves you and that I love you. But also that God loves all of creation. Out of an abundance of love we – and all that is – were created. And one of the reasons that I believe God sent me to you was so that together we could come to know God more, to love and trust God better, so that we could serve God more and better.

Other than caring for you all through the ups and downs of all of our lives these past five years, I think my most treasured moments have been when I shared my sermons with you. And as often is the case, I preach what is most difficult for me. If I try to take the easy route to understanding Holy Scripture and how it might change the way we think and live, the Holy Spirit redirects me to the most difficult of understandings. Today's epistle from Paul's second letter to Timothy, is a reminder of how to preach, and not how the preacher preaches, but how we all live the Gospel truth and share it. We could be just disciples, but we are called to be apostles too. We are all being called to share what we have learned, to live the truth not just to internalize it.

I wonder, do we have itching ears? Do we seek out teachers to suit our own desires? Do we hear the words of Jesus and his works and seek out those who interpret them in the safe way that suits our own proclivities? Do we choose teachers of Scripture who aline with our own tastes? Our own tendencies? If we listen only to ourselves and like-minded scholars speak and preachers interpret the Word, are we cheating ourselves of the truth of the Word?

Every week I have spoken to you in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you could reduce all my sermons to one sentence, I think it likely would be that God loves all people. And that love always has been and will be forever. I myself hear this message everywhere: in scripture, in other preachers' sermons, in our conversations over

meals in the Parish Hall, in the questions we ask during preparation for reception and confirmation. I even hear the same message on the Internet. Everyday I get several different messages from Christian list-services. One of my favorites right now is from the Society of St. John the Evangelist.[3] Brother Mark Brown's message was spot on:

> "If Christ is in me and Christ is in you, we have something in common. We are no longer separate. We are no longer separated by so many miles—or by race or class or disease. We have something of our essence in common."

And we always will.

So we will be leaving home this week, but I will take you with me. I will carry you and your ministry to me and with me – always – wherever I go because we have God's love in common.

Lord, may it be so.

Amen.

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[1] From *Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year C*, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.

[2] See https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dsb/2-timothy-4.html, William Barclay on 2 Timothy.

[3] The Society of St. John the Evangelist is an Anglican religious order for men. The members live under a rule of life and, at profession, make monastic vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. The SSJE brothers work and pray for the sake of others, preaching and teaching the gospel, and offering our prayers on behalf of, and in union with, all people. Preaching and leading retreats are central ministries for the community, and all brothers are trained in offering them.