

# Living Away from Home

*Sermon preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast  
Olentangy Christian Reformed Church  
Columbus, Ohio  
April 6, 2008*

## **1 Peter 1:17-21**

Since you call upon a Father who judges without partiality according to what each one has done, conduct yourselves with reverent fear while you are living away from home, knowing that you were set free from the empty way of life you inherited not by something perishable, like silver or gold, but, like that of a spotless, blameless lamb, by the precious blood of Christ, the one who was chosen before the world's foundation but manifested at the end of the ages for your sake – you, with faith in God because of him – God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

## **Children's Story**

For his whole life, Sammy the Squirrel had lived at home. For his whole life, his mom and dad had been close by, keeping an eye on him, keeping him safe. Until the weekend of the big camp out.

Early that Friday morning, Sammy and his friends loaded up their backpacks and hiked deep into the Great Forest. They walked forever. Then they walked some more. At last they picked out a campsite.

While the others pitched the tents, Sammy and Chester the Chipmunk went off to gather firewood. Soon their arms were full, and they started back to the campsite.

At least, they thought they were going back to the campsite. Somehow, though, they had gotten turned around in the woods. They didn't know which way to go! All the trees looked the same to them. And they had left no footprints in the hard-packed ground. How would they find their way back?!

That's when Sammy remembered what his mom had always told him: "If you get lost in the woods, don't look at the trees; they all look the same. Look up. Find the sun. Watch the way the wind blows the treetops. And don't forget to call out for help!"

And that's just what Sammy and Chester did. They looked up. They figured out a way to go – the same way as the wind. And they started calling out to their friends. And when their friends started calling back, Sammy and Chester found their way back to the campsite.

Sammy decided then and there that it would be scary to live away from home. He also decided that, when you do live away from home, it's important to remember what your mom and dad have told you.

## **Sermon**

Americans are people who move. For all the usual and unusual reasons, tens of millions of us move every year. The accumulation of all those reasons and all those moves means that a great many of us live nowhere near where we grew up, that a great many of us are living away from the place we once knew as home.

For some people, moving is an unavoidable necessity. They haven't looked to move. But for work reasons or school reasons or health reasons, they've packed up and left. For other people, moving is a welcome opportunity. By moving, these people escape bad memories, bad relationships, or bad debts. By moving, they hope to make a fresh start, and often do.

Whatever the reasons, the result is the same. People who move wind up living away from home. And once you leave home, you are forever gone. Even if the next moving van takes you on a return trip, you can't go home again.

**Peter had some words for people living away from home.** Actually, that's a governing theme in his first letter. He addresses the letter to believers living, for now, in the diaspora. They share a common

heritage, a common identity, and a common destiny in Christ. Yet they are living in communities scattered across the world. The question was and is, how to live in Christ when you're living in Galatia – or in Gahanna; how to live in Christ when you're living in Rome – or along Rome-Hilliard; how to live in Christ when you're living on the Upper Nile – or in Upper Arlington. The answer begins, Peter says, with “reverent fear.”

This fear isn't of the nail-biting variety. Nor is it a chew-your-own-foot-off-to-get-out-of-the-trap terror. No. This fear is respect and honor. Respect and honor toward someone who knows better than you do. Respect and honor toward someone who knows you better than you do.

The Ohio State University requires freshmen (and soon maybe sophomores, too) to live on campus. Various reasons inform this requirement. Not always explicitly stated is this reason: young people living away from home for the first time don't always live wisely or well. Respect and honor for parents have a restraining effect as long as students are living at home. When they are living away from home, those restraints are off.

“Reverent fear,” on the other hand, imposes some restraints, even when you're living away from home. Peter says, “You were set free from the empty way of life you inherited.” In other words, Don't live the way you used to live – ignorant of, or disrespectful of, your heavenly Father's family standards!

To take one, general example – whether on campus, on the east side of High Street, or in Upper Arlington – our culture is all about catering to our desires, whether easily satisfied hormonal urges or deep-seated longings for status and its trappings. But in the Father's household, desires always submit – submit to the rule of love, submit to the common welfare, submit to respect for the image of God in oneself and in others. In the Father's household, desires always submit to one, overriding, passionate desire: to see the holiness, justice, and peace of God's kingdom.

Peter says, In the Father's household, you're not slaves to your desires any more. You were set free by the precious blood of Christ. So don't live like desire's slaves!

Young people living away from home for the first time can get into trouble in the absence of parental restraints, restraints that kept them safe and well at home. But Peter knows that no matter where you live, you're not living away from your Father. So, he says, conduct yourselves accordingly.

**There's another analogy when it comes to living away from home.** My friend and colleague Harry Winters, of Akron, has refugees in his congregation. They come from southeast Asia and from west Africa. They've come because of political or economic danger. They've come with a certain amount of desperation. Yet wherever they've come from, or why, they have this in common: they're living away from home and – here's the point – they feel like they don't fit in, like they don't belong where they are now. These refugees know they are in a foreign country. So much that once meant “home” they don't find here. Language, food, customs, expectations, desires even – it's all so different. And they are reminded of that every day.

In Christ, we're all refugees. Our home is not here – even if we grew up here, even if we've never moved. We are refugees. And we have strange customs: we bathe our children in public and put the name of God on them, in baptism. We eat strange food: we fill up on a meal of bread and wine that we call the body and blood of Christ. We speak a strange language: the language of humility, the language of penitence, the language of praise. And we have strange expectations: we set our sights, not on the dominant triad of money, sex, and power, not on the rich and famous, not on the bold and beautiful, but on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

In Christ we're all refugees. Yet that refugee analogy breaks down. Because our home is here; this is where we belong. Jeremiah urged the exiles in Babylon to adopt their new home, to work and to pray for its welfare, because its welfare would mean their welfare. And so here we live and work and love. Here we pray for justice and peace. Here we embrace holiness. Here we submit our desires to godly restraints.

So we're not refugees. And yet we're not exiles either. Because this land, this earth, is our native land, and our ultimate land.

For now, that land is under foreign domination. Principalities and powers push and shove people around. The kingdoms of this world – kingdoms of politics and medicine, kingdoms of education and entertainment, kingdoms of business and science, kingdoms of crime and warfare – the kingdoms of this world resist the kingdom of God. The kingdoms of this world try to throw off all restraints. The kingdoms of this world try to live as far away from home, as far away from God as possible, acting like stereotypical drunken frat boys. The kingdoms of this world don't care at all about the trail of destruction and tears they leave in their wake. For now, our land is under their foreign domination. For now. But the true King is coming: Christ, who has set us free; Christ, who will set us free again.

Meanwhile, we'll keep living – away from home – in reverent fear, waiting for, praying for, working for the holiness, justice, and peace of God's kingdom. And we'll keep doing that – whether we have to move or not.