

# Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

## GOING HOME

Isaiah 58:1-9a

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Analysis by Ron Starenko

*Shout out, do not hold back!*

*Lift up your voice like a trumpet!*

*Announce to my people their rebellion,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.*

*2Yet day after day they seek me  
and delight to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness  
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;  
they ask of me righteous judgments,  
they delight to draw near to God.*

*3"Why do we fast, but you do not see?  
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"  
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,  
and oppress all your workers.*

*4Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight  
and to strike with a wicked fist.*

*Such fasting as you do today  
will not make your voice heard on high.*

*5Is such the fast that I choose,  
a day to humble oneself?*

*Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,  
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?*

*Will you call this a fast,  
a day acceptable to the LORD?*

*6Is not this the fast that I choose:*

*to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?*

*7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*8Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;  
your vindicator shall go before you,  
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

*9Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: The Homeless**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Reckoning with Our Dislocation*

Unless we have had the experience, as my parents and grandparents a generation or two back, none of us has any idea what it is like to leave one homeland for another. Going home for them was often an escape from a place that was no longer home, lives disrupted by war and famine. The Old Testament people, as another example, as in the Isaiah lesson, once dragged from their home and dispersed into captivity, homeless in Babylon, for them yet another experience of dislocation. While most of us never knew what it was like being exiles, we live, nevertheless with a kind of homelessness and restlessness, always searching for permanence, if only in buying, selling, renovating houses, a nostalgia, a going home, hardly coming to terms with our homelessness, always wanting to “go back home.”

## **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Retreating Into Our Own Interests (v. 13)***

Our answer to that, which only serves to perpetuate our sense of homelessness, is to retreat into what serves our own interests. Somehow we believe that “going back home,” what always eludes our grasp, a sense of permanence we can never manage. We buy, sell, rent, when possible, renovate, restore, replace, in a sense always homeless, exiles, hoping to find a place. So, now our search ends up being a retreat into our self-interests (v. 3b).

## **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Resigned***

Only to discover that we have no home to go to, having “no lasting city,” about which the author to Hebrews reminded us (Heb. 13:14). Leaving home—we all know the experience—is like leaving the womb. There is always a part of us that wants to return to the comfort, security, the symbiotic existence, never finding it, conditioned endlessly to do a rerun. The sense of homelessness that the Israelites know in their Babylonian captivity bitterly served to remind them of the homelessness they knew early on before entering the new land, after their bondage in Egypt, also depressing days of darkness and gloom (v. 10b; also Amos 5:20) which everyone experiences sooner or later. How hard it is for us in our comfortable lives to come to grips with the emptiness of our own making, and more so the painful realization that it is God who turns us over to the dislocation we deserve. The best that they—or we—can do in the face of such wrath is to run and hide, to dismiss and deny, to react with anger and opposition; or, more realistically, admit how far we’ve wandered from home, perhaps leaving us a step closer to our recovery.

## **PROGNOSIS: The Home-Bound**

## **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Rebounding***

The good news is that we have Jesus, who was with us in our homelessness, to get us all the way home. Consider that he didn't have a home, had "nowhere to lay his head"(Matt. 8:20), a homeless man for all the homeless, all the way to the cross, after he had told his disciples on the eve of his death, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:3), to take our homelessness and make it his own, suffer it away, and then, rising from the dead would secure new home for us all a place in the (Son), so that we might live out all our days as a "going home." The story has now come full circle. The nation of Israel of old, homeless more than once in their captivity, a wandering people, before the Exodus and after the national collapses, always somehow rebounding. Now Jesus becomes the paradigm, the homeless one for all the homeless. Indeed, when he had collapsed in death on the cross and then came back from the dead, he brought with him all the homeless, now redeemed, safe in the Father's everlasting care, so that we might both be at home and always going home.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Returning to the Lord*

Heading home is an on-going process, the daily act of drawing near to God (v. 2), renewing our connection, laying aside our relentless pursuit of achieving our goals of securing money, fame, or pleasure, whether that action takes the form of prayer, contemplation, refocusing, being at home as it were with God, the repeated call of the prophets. This involves giving up rather than giving in to the pursuit of peace of mind, fame, success, all ways of wanting to validate ourselves. The Christian life is a daily process of coming home, whether in our prayer life, or our participation in the Sacrament where we meet Jesus, his presence our home, our security, our identity.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Reaching Out*

There is a sending, too. We are called to become "a nation that

practices righteousness" (v. 2). If indeed we have come home, finding our righteousness before God in Jesus, who is God's homemaker among us, then surely our mission as a church community, our calling as individual Christ-bearers, is to talk back to the darkness and gloom all around, as though we had been released from captivity and now have a chance to support "Bread for the World," or participate in building houses with "Habitat for Humanity," or engage in local feeding ministries. To paraphrase, we who were once homeless and now have found a home (cf. Eph. 2:4-7) have no alternative than to make a home, one way or another, as "we show hospitality to strangers" (Heb. 13:2), or as the apostle Paul encourages us, to "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). Going home!