

Dreaming a Country That Feels Like Home  
Mark 6:1-13

Have you ever experienced being homesick? I have been living in the United States for 13 years and my last visit to Korea was 10 years ago but I have never been homesick. Of course, my mother has occasionally visited me and I call her every day. Perhaps, that's why I don't feel homesick. Maybe I have itchy feet, preferring to travel to different parts of the United States than to visiting Korea. When Juhee and I have traveled, we have often been amazed by the beauty and majesty of nature. Yosemite Valley, the Grand Canyon, Death Valley, Yellowstone, the White Mountains... there are so many beautiful places in the United States. They are beautiful! The United States is beautiful!

Do you know how to say "United States" in Korean? It's "미국(mi-guk)." Say "미국" That's your country's name in Korean. 미(mi) means 'beautiful' and 국(guk) means 'a country' so a literal translation of 미국 is 'a beautiful country.' What makes America beautiful? Of course, it's splendid nature. Spacious skies, amber waves of grain, purple mountains, plus beautiful oceans and beaches! What else? Maybe it's people. But most of all, you feel America is beautiful because it is your home. Today is the Fourth of July and we celebrate the birth of American independence on this day. In some sense, the Fourth of July is the day when our forefathers claimed this land as their home. Maya Angelou said, "The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned." Nothing is better than going home to family!

**Jesus goes home! And rejected!**

In today's scripture, Jesus goes home. Why does he go home? Mark doesn't tell us. He just says that Jesus went home. But we can imagine why Jesus went home because he is like us. Perhaps, he goes home for the same reasons we go home. He goes home because, it's home! Nothing is better than going home to family! Maybe Jesus goes for comfort and relaxation after his busy mission work. He goes because he thinks that no matter what he has done to this point, they will take him in, or maybe he is going home to try and heal his relationship with his family and what might have been broken by misunderstandings between them.

In chapter three of Mark's gospel, Jesus heals the man with the withered hand and gets in a fight with the religious leaders who wished he had waited a day to do this work! But the crowds loved him and followed him. Then Jesus set aside time with his disciples, going up on a mountain, teaching them and praying. But word got back home. Jesus's family heard that Jesus was doing something weird and unconventional. And their conclusion was that Jesus was crazy. Jesus was not a P.K, (priest's kid). He was C.K, Carpenter's kid. Carpenter's Kids from Nazareth don't go off and fight with authorities. He must behave according to custom or he must be off his rocker. So, they went to bring him home.

When they got to a house where Jesus was teaching people, word got to Jesus that his mother and his brothers were waiting outside to see him. What did Jesus say? Jesus said, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Those were strong words, that had to hurt! So, perhaps in chapter six, today's scripture, Jesus goes home to explain what he really meant by his words. Maybe he goes to heal the hurts of misunderstanding. Maybe he doesn't want his family to miss the opportunity to be in God's family so he goes to give his family another chance to see a larger vision of what family might mean.

When his family, relatives, neighbors and maybe old friends gathered at the synagogue on that Sabbath day, he spoke and they were astounded by him. For a moment, Jesus might have thought his trip to home was worth it. Unfortunately, people's amazement soon turned in an unexpected direction. Someone said, "Wait a minute. Isn't this that carpenter's kid? Who does he think he is?" And everything fell apart. They turned on him and called him "Son of Mary." How does that sound to you? It sounds o.k to us but this was an insult implying that his parentage was suspect. They laughed, they sneered, they ignored and insulted him. His hometown rejected Jesus. They didn't take him in because he was different. Not every home is a comforting and accepting place. Some homes are broken and not beautiful.

### **Is America a beautiful home for everyone?**

America has been home, a sweet home for many people. But we must accept that often, this beautiful nation has failed to be home for some of its own people. For many African Americans, America has not been a safe house. Latinos have been treated as pawns or second-class citizens. Asian Americans have been treated as perpetual foreigners in their own homeland. Have you ever experienced someone saying "go back to your country?" I had one such experience. It was my second year of study in the United States. I was hungry and so went to get my favorite American food, a hamburger at McDonard's. I pick up my big mac meal and took a seat. An old woman who sat at the next table stared at me. Then she rose from her seat and go to the counter to pick up napkins. When she passed my table, she mumbled "go back to your country. Women have rights in this country." She seemed mentally unstable so I just ignored her. But I couldn't enjoy my favorite food that day. The same thing happens to many Asian Americans who were born in this country. They are rejected. They are insulted in their own homeland because they look different. Not every home is a comforting and accepting place. Some homes are broken and not beautiful.

### **America the Beautiful**

Jesus went home, but home didn't take him in. Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. If I was in that situation, if my family didn't take me in, I would feel sorry for myself. But what did Jesus do, when the people in his hometown didn't take him?

"He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." We remember what happened when Jesus proclaimed the gospel, cast out evil spirits and healed people. People gathered around Jesus, shared meals together and became a new family. So Jesus wanted his disciples to do the same thing. "Jesus sent his disciples out to create a sense of community, build relationships and care for those they met, trust them, rely on them, make yourself at home with them." What Jesus tried to do was to create a new family, a new community, not based on blood lineage but on a commitment to a vision of home he called the kingdom of God and a commitment to love one another. We are called to be home for each other.

As an immigrant, I didn't really think of the United States as my home. I was an international student. I was a stranger. But my perception has gradually changed through the experience of love of my congregation members. A few years ago, Juhee returned to Korea because her father was diagnosed with cancer. I was not able to go to Korea with her so I stayed alone for about a month My church members worried if I would eat well. They checked in on me and brought food, making sure their pastor was not starving. When Juhee came back, everyone at the church gave her a big hug and said, "welcome home!" At that moment, I first felt that the

United States, though still a strange land to me, could be my home. Your love for me, your understanding of my Korean accent, your hospitality and kindness have made me feel that I am home. Thank you for making me feel that Asbury is my home!

We, as disciples of Jesus Christ, are called to be home for everyone, especially, for those who don't find home in their own homeland. On this Fourth of July, we celebrate that our forefathers claimed this beautiful country as our home. But I hope that we, as Christians celebrate this day not for the glories of a richly blessed nation but for a vision Jesus implanted in our hearts, a vision of what we could be and long to be. We dream of a country that feels like home, a sweet home. We hope for our beautiful country to be a safe home for all the people. Jesus Christ shows us the way to be home, a home for all God's children. Let us share this vision of a new home in Christ and commit ourselves to building a home in our church and society. Amen.