THE HOMECOMING
Acts 14:21-28

Read Scripture Text

PRAYER

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most wonderful and fascinating features of God’s creation is that God created animals with an incredible sense of direction called “the homing instinct.”

…….Against all odds, SALMON swim home from the sea to spawn in the rivers of their birth.

…….After flying thousands of miles, the SWALLOWS return to their nests year after year in San Juan Capistrano.

…….Every year thousands of TUNDRA SWAN and SNOW GEESE make a 4,000-5,000 mile journey from Alaska to the Pocossin Lake Wildlife Refuge right here in eastern North Carolina.

Even domesticated animals have shown a remarkable instinct to “go home.”

If a dog or cat strays………or is sold to a new owner………or is carried long distances away and abandoned………the animal will act lost and homesick as they struggle to find their way back home. There are documented cases of dogs and cats traveling hundreds even thousands of miles over a period of weeks and months until they find their way home.
Did God create humans with a similar “homing instinct?”

Ecclesiastes 3:11  He (God) has set eternity in the hearts of men.

The apostle Paul states it this way in II Corinthians 5:1,2……..

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. (now listen carefully to this second verse) Meanwhile we GROAN, LONGING to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.

“This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through.”

“Some glad morning when this life is o’er, I’ll fly away.”

“When we all get to heaven what a day of rejoicing that will be.”

“When the roll is called up yonder I’ll be there.”

You see, “God has set eternity in our hearts.” And no matter how comfortable we may be in this world, our hearts are continually drawing us homeward and heavenward.

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But while we are in this world there is something that draws us back to our earthly home.

……At the end of a long hard day of work you just want to go HOME.

……When you have been on a long trip, you’re ready to get HOME!

……If you have ever traveled to a foreign country, you have no doubt found yourself a little homesick for HOME.
ILLUSTRATION

ROD SERLING, the New York playwright who was most famous as the narrator on the 60’s hit TV SHOW, The Twilight Zone, once wrote………..

“Everybody has to have a hometown. In the strangely brittle, terribly sensitive makeup of the human being, there is a need for a place to hang our hat………a ‘geographical womb’ to crawl back to………a special place where we can say, ‘That’s where I was born’………or…..’That’s where I grew up.”

When I dig through my memory, this place I call HOME gives me a distinct feeling of warmth, comfort and well-being. For whatever else I may have had……or lost……or will find, I’ve still got a hometown. And this, no one can take away from me.”

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Each year at this same time we are drawn back to Christian Hope Church of Christ to celebrate A HOMECOMING.

Whether Christian Hope has always been your home church………or it was the home church of your youth and you moved away………or you have more recently become part of the Christian Hope family………today is a special day for all of us.

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SCRIPTURE STUDY

ACTS 14:21-28

In many ways, PAUL and BARNABAS looked upon the Church at Antioch as their “home church.”

We learn in ACTS 13:1-3 that it was from the Church at Antioch Paul and Barnabas were sent off on their first of three missionary journeys through the region of Asia Minor. We also learn in verse 5 of chapter 13 that a young man named John Mark also accompanied them on this journey, but he became homesick early on and returned to Antioch.
As we come to our scripture text in **ACTS 14**, PAUL and BARNABAS have just returned home after their two year missionary journey. The first thing they did was gather all the Church together for a big **HOMECOMING CELEBRATION**.

As we reflect on what that HOMECOMING meant to the Church in Antioch, we gain some insight on what HOMECOMING means to us today.

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**I. Homecoming Is A Time To Reflect on Where We Have Been** vs. 26, 27

1. I don’t know about you, but I would love to have been present at that Homecoming at the Antioch Church of Christ and heard Paul and Barnabas talk about all the places they had been.

2. Thank the Lord, we have their travel log recorded in the scriptures.

3. As Paul and Barnabas told of their great missionary adventure it soon became obvious to the members of the Antioch Church theirs’ had not been a “sight-seeking-vacation.”

        ……Their journey had started on the **Isle of Cyprus**, which is where **Barnabas** called home. They traveled to several cities on that island **preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ**.

        ……While in the city of **PAPHOS**, they encountered a false prophet named **Bar-Jesus** ………”**Bar**” means, “son of.” So this false prophet was portraying himself to be “**the son of Jesus.**” He even tried to buy the power of Holy Spirit from Paul and Barnabas.
Paul and Barnabas went on to tell about preaching in the city of PERGA. It was there young John Mark left them and returned home. This issue of John Mark leaving would become a great point of contention between Paul and Barnabas later.

After leaving the Island of Cyprus Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch of Pisidia. According to historical writings it is believed that this is the place where Paul came down with a bad case of malaria. It was through their preaching of the gospel many Gentiles came to accept Jesus Christ. But the JEWS who lived in that region stirred up a riot against Paul and Barnabas and ran them out of town.

From Antioch Pisidia they traveled to Iconium... from Iconium it was on to Lystra and then Derbe.

While in Lystra, Paul nearly lost his life when the people stoned him and drug him outside the city and left him for dead.

4. Don’t you know the people gathered at that great Homecoming that day were glued to the edges of their seats as they listened to Paul and Barnabas tell of all these experiences in the places they had been.

5. Let’s reflect for a moment on WHERE CHRISTIAN HOPE CHURCH has been.

Many of you are much more familiar with this Church’s history than I, but let me briefly sketch where this Church has been since her humble beginnings.
In 1850, John Gurganus donated the land for the first Church building to be built upon. Some early writings seem to indicate this Church was originally named “the Long Ridge Church.” But in 1854 the name was changed to Christian Hope Church of Christ. Millard Fillmore was the President of the United States at that time. And there were only thirty states.

With this area being rich in Civil War tradition, it is very likely many Union and Confederate troops walked across the very ground upon which this Church was first founded.

The first mention of a Homecoming at Christian Hope was 117 years ago in March of 1892.

On Easter Sunday, April 5, 1942, the Christian Hope Church building was destroyed by fire started by flying embers from a forest fire on the west side of Long Ridge Road. Some of you here today can still remember that day.

Only the pulpit that currently sits in our Church foyer, the communion set, the piano, two gas lamps, and two chairs were salvaged from that fire. Ironically, that was also a very difficult time for this country as well, as American soldiers were off fighting in World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbor five months before the Church fire.

While a new Church building was being constructed, the members of Christian Hope Church worshiped with her neighbors at the Mount Olive Free Will Baptist Church.

On the first Sunday of the month, the Christian Hope minister would preach. And on the third Sunday of the month the Mount Olive preacher would preach.

It was two years later in 1944 when the first Homecoming was celebrated in the newly constructed Church building.
In 1987 work began on the current building in which we are meeting today. On October 2, 1988, this building was completed and dedicated to the glory of the Lord.

H.S. Gurganus.......J.L. Winfield.......Thomas Green....... 
John R. Smith.......H.H. Ambrose.......J.B. Respess....... 
Warren Davis.........Wilmer Chesson.........Ward Woolard....... 
Dallas Ayers........Bill Comer........Danny Everette.........

Larry Woodley.......Owen Emanuel.......and Daniel Davenport 
...............these are just a few of the many men who have preached 
the gospel at Christian Hope Church of Christ throughout her long history.

6. And so today as WE THINK ABOUT WHERE WE HAVE BEEN may we not forget those who founded this Church long ago and those who faithfully served her in years gone by.

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II. Homecoming Is A Time to Reflect On Where We Are  vs. 28

1. We know from historical records that Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey covered a two year period during 48 and 49 A.D. And we know the second missionary journey did not begin until early 50 A.D.

During that “season of refreshment” Paul and Barnabas had time to reflect on WHERE THEY BEEN and WHERE THEY WERE NOW as they made their preparations for a second missionary journey.
2. But Paul and Silas were not simply resting on their laurels during this time. We learn in verse 23 that Paul and Barnabas had left the Churches they had established on that first missionary journey under the direction of elders. They were confident that even in their absence, the kingdom of Christ was continuing to advance in Asia Minor.

3. Where is Christian Hope Church of Christ right now?

I believe that is all a matter of perspective. Those of you who have a broader history in this Church may see things one way, whereas those who are relatively new to Christian Hope Church may see things in a different way.

Having been here just one year and three months can I tell you what I see as the “new kid on the block?”

4. I see Christian Hope Church of Christ as a Church that has had many ups and downs over the years, which I believe can be said of most any Church.

This Church has had some days of great glory where she was thriving and growing and these Church pews were filled.

And this Church has seen her share of some “not-so-glorious” days. But I truly believe the Church has emerged from those difficult times a much more loving, more caring and more united Church.

I see a genuine hunger on the part of many of you to learn the scriptures.

I see a genuine desire to be a “good neighbor” by reaching out to help those in this community.
I see Christian Hope Church as perhaps the most missions-minded Church I have had the privilege of serving over these past 32 years.

I see a Church that is on her way UP, not on her way DOWN.

5. Do we still have lots of room for improvement? Yes we do!

Do we need more commitment in a lot of areas? Yes we do!

6. But as we look at where we are right now, I believe all the ingredients are here for GOD to breathe brand new life into Christian Hope Church of Christ!

Homecoming is a time to reflect on where we have been. Homecoming is a time to reflect on where we are.

And finally……

III. Homecoming Is A Time To Reflect on Where We Are Going

1. The Church at Antioch was perhaps one of, if not the most vibrant Church in the New Testament.

2. It is from this Church we learn a very valuable truth and that is this:

   In order for a Church to maintain her vitality and stay healthy, she must never become satisfied with status quo.
3. Having sent Paul and Barnabas on that first missionary journey, it would have been very easy for the Church at Antioch to become very self-satisfied that they had done all they needed to do.

   But instead, this Church focused on doing even more in the future.

   We read in Acts chapter 15 that the Antioch Church was the launching pad for Paul’s second missionary journey. That journey took Paul much farther than the first resulting in the winning of many more lost souls and the establishment of many new Churches in places where the gospel had never been preached. And the Church at Antioch played a key role in that.

   But that’s not all. We read in Acts chapter 18 that the Antioch Church partnered with Paul on his third and final missionary journey as well. The Antioch Church was constantly striving toward a better future!

4. What is the future of Christian Hope Church of Christ? Where do we go from here?

   Are Christian Hope Church’s best days behind her or ahead of her?

5. I believe Christian Hope Church of Christ can learn a very valuable lesson from the Church at Antioch. And that is if we are to be a strong, vibrant, healthy Church 25-30 years from now, should the Lord tarry, we must strive to be a strong, vibrant, healthy Church today.
6. Brothers and sisters, it is up to you and me to build the bridge to the next generation of Christian Hope Church.

   Our goal is not to become the biggest Church in this area. Our goal is not to offer more and better programs than other Churches. Our goal is not to have the most attractive Church building in this area.

7. Our greatest goal is to become the kind of Church Jesus Christ would have us to be……A Church that LOVES GOD and LOVES PEOPLE ! Everything else is secondary in importance!

8. And so as we set our sights for the future of Christian Hope Church of Christ, “let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

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C O N C L U S I O N

There’s a place near to me, where I’m longing to be,
With my friends at the old country Church.
There with mother we went, and our Sundays were spent,
With our friends at the old country Church.

As a small country boy, how my heart beat with joy,
When I knelt in the old country Church.
And the Savior above, by His wonderful love,
Saved my soul at the old country Church.

Oft my thoughts make me weep, for so many now sleep,
In their graves near the old country Church,
And one day I’ll rest with the friends I love best,
In a grave near the old country Church.

Precious years of memories, oh what joy they bring to me,
How I long once more to be, with my friends at Christian Hope Church.