

For those who pay attention to the Sermon Titles in the Bulletin, I want to cue you in that I have changed the title for this message. On Wednesday I was going one way with this, but then God's Word and the Spirit said, "Nope, we are going this way." So Today's Message is now titled: "Jesus Goes Home."

Pictures?! How many of you have pictures in your wallets or purses of your kids or grandkids or nephews and nieces? How many want to show them today?

Videos?! We have videos of the kids as well.

Stories?! We have so many stories! My family is of that perfect age where we can sit around the table and tell story after story of events from the growing years. And we laugh till we cry, and we cry till we laugh: stories of growing up.

So why is it that there is only one story in the whole Bible of Jesus growing up?

Didn't people love little Jesus enough to remember and tell stories about him as a child? I think they did. But what the Gospel writers want us to remember about Jesus is his overwhelming mission: which is his love for us. So they tell us only one childhood story.

You know the story. The parents of Jesus expect their son to be playing with the other kids. Instead Jesus is, as the Bible says, "*in the things of my Father.*" The literal Greek has Jesus saying: "*I must be in the things of my Father.*"

When Joseph and Mary found Jesus sitting in the Temple with the Teachers, Jesus said to them: "*Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I had to be here, dealing with the things of my Father?*" [Luke 2:49 The Message]

What are the things of the Father? One of the things of the Father is his love for his children. Take a look at this quote: "*My children need love the most when they deserve it the least.*"

Erma Bombeck made a classic list of New Year's Resolutions. A few of the choice resolutions were:

- ✓ “I am going to clean this dump [the house] just as soon as the kids grow up.”
 - ✓ “I will go to no doctor whose office plants have died.”
 - ✓ “I will never loan my car to anyone I have given birth to.”
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But it was the last resolution of her list that I want to lay out before us this morning. Erma wrote: “I am going to remember that my children need love the most when they deserve it the least.”

That is the way God feels about you. In fact, I think Erma borrowed her line from the Bible. The Bible says: “*God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*” [Romans 5:8] Circle the words, “*while we were still sinners.*”

God is saying to you and me: “*My children need love the most when they deserve it the least – and in Jesus I am going to love them to life!*”

When do we need this love of God the most? If we look at the OT there were three problem time periods when the people needed God’s love the most. They are pictures for us when we really need God’s love as well

1. When there is Slavery.

The most basic definition of a slave is “a person owned or controlled by a master.” The Bible says that we are sometimes owned or controlled by masters other than our Creator.

The best picture is when the Bible tells of the descendants of Joseph in Egypt. They became slaves. They built what they did not want to build; they lived where they did not want to live. They could not set themselves free.

Then the Bible has these marvelous words: “*The Hebrews cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. God heard their groaning ... and knew it was time to act.*” [Exodus 2:23-24] Circle the words: “*time to act.*”

- What are you building that you do not want to build? Are you building some resentments? Some anger? Some walls?
- Are you living in some uncomfortable places where you do not want to live? Walking with people who are not really your friends and who are leading you into compromising situations? Spending time where you are not growing?

We need the love of God most when we are slaves to the things that destroy: Paul said that sin can be our master. When Jesus said he had to be in the things of his Father, he meant he was finding ways to set us free from the things that enslave us.

2. When there are Giants.

Ben and Marcie Hushka gave me this book for Christmas. It is Max Lucado's newest book titled, ***Facing Your Giants***. I love this book! It is about the battle between David and Goliath – and our own battles.

There were many things that led up to the fight between little Dave and big G? For three hundred years Israel was supposed to claim the Promised Land. But they did not in faith claim the land. They lived in the land with the ---ites: the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites.

And the Philistines. It looked like the Israelites were going to lose the Promised Land. It was a watershed moment.

You know the story. For 40 days – that is: for a very long time – 9 foot tall Goliath ridiculed the Israelites. No one rose to accept the challenge until young and skinny David came to the Israelite camp one day. David was incensed that one single giant would stop God's people. Was not God on their side?!

So David took five stones and his sling, and approached the giant. David said to the giant: "*Today the LORD will conquer you...*" [1 Samuel 17:46]

At this point Lucado writes in his book directly to you and me. He says:

*Your Goliath doesn't carry a sword or shield; he brandishes blades of unemployment, abandonment, sexual abuse, or depression. Your giant doesn't parade up and down the hills of Palestine; he prances through your office, your bedroom, your classroom. He brings bills you cannot pay, grades you cannot make, people you cannot please, whisky you cannot resist, pornography you cannot refuse, a career you cannot escape, a past you cannot shake, and a future you cannot face."*¹

Jesus says to your giants: "Today the LORD will conquer you!" Circle the words, "the LORD." That is why Jesus had to grow up, and be in the things of his Father.

We need the love of God when we least deserve it. Maybe for you today it is the giants. Jesus came to tear down the giants in your life. It might take a long time for that to happen, but know that Jesus is in the journey, and in the victory..

3. When we are Far from Home.

A prophet by the name of Micah said "God has told you what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" [Micah 6:8]

There came a time when God allowed Babylon to defeat the people of Judah and take them into bondage. Why? Because they were not able to do these things which God required of them.

This too is our problem. We are not able to do what God requires of us. We, too, are far from home: from the place where justice, kindness, and walking delightedly with God is the way of life.

- Imagine a world without justice. Actually, we do not need to imagine that world. We live in an unjust world every week.

We come here today and we can share stories of injustice. A child who is not cared for properly, a job that should have been given to the best candidate but instead

goes to the connected one, a bonus that was earned but not shared, an illness that is just not fair.

In some ways we have been the cause of injustice in the world. We do not have to imagine an unjust world – we live in it and participate in it every week.

- Imagine a world that is not kind. We do not need to imagine that world. We live in an unkind world every week.

Soldiers killed in Iraq every day – every day. Families tearing themselves apart every day – every day. Hurtful words spoken to vulnerable people every day – every day.

In some ways we have been the source of unkindness in the world. We do not have to imagine an unkind world – we live it every week.

- Imagine a world where people do not walk delightedly with God. Once again: We do not need to imagine that world. We live in a world that ignores God every week.

I am not just talking about ignoring God by missing a worship service. I am talking about ignoring God by breaking those rules. You know the ones: You shall not covet. You shall not bear false witness.

In some ways you are one of those who walks far from God at times. We do not need to imagine an ungodly world – we just need to look at our own footsteps.

The Father says: *“My children need love the most when they deserve it the least – and in Jesus I am going to love them to life!”*

So the one story from the childhood of Jesus says that Jesus went home to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, and lived obediently with them. [Luke 2:51] Did you catch the beautiful words of grace in that simple statement from the Bible?

Jesus lived with them. Jesus accepted them. For the next 18 years Jesus lived with his parents and the people of Nazareth – with their injustices, their lack of kindnesses, and their times of ungodliness. He still loved them.

He still loves you... A theologian by the name of Paul Tillich once said in a sermon these words: “You are accepted. Do not try to do anything right now. Do not try to perform any great deed right now. That will come later. Right now: simply accept the fact that you are accepted.”²

I invite you to receive these words this morning: Jesus who went home with his parents. Jesus is going home with you. The wonderful story of the God who went home with his children.

He will live with you for the next 18 years – and more. He will free you from your slaveries. He will face with you your giants. He will bring you back home again to the place where you need to be.

Hear the words of grace one last time this morning: *“So Jesus went back to Nazareth with them, and lived obediently with them.”*

Would you like to Jesus to go home with you today? He will. Say this prayer quietly to Jesus as I pray it for all of us...

Jesus, as the new year begins, I am overwhelmed by your grace and mercy. To think that God himself wants to come home with me, and help me battle my addictions and giants and loneliness. Lord Jesus, I am inviting you to come home with me this week. We can spend time together! And change my priorities. Maybe we can even move mountains together! OK, you move the mountains, and I will believe. I believe. Amen.

Song: “Be My Home”

¹ Max Lucado, [Facing Your Giants](#), pages 2-3

² Paul Tillich, [The Shaking of the Foundations](#)