Acts 7:55-60

I Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

In her memoir, *Traveling Mercies*, celebrated novelist Anne Lamott writes about why she stays so close to her church. She says, “I think we missed attending church ten times in twelve years. In long-ago photos my son Sam would be snuggled in people’s arms, and in later ones, he's trying to wiggle free of hugs.”

She mentions their pastor Veronica who recounts her own stories of long ago. In one story, she tells the congregation about a time when she was a child of seven and her best friend got lost. "That little girl ran up and down the streets of their town," Lamott writes, "but couldn’t find a single landmark she recognized. A policeman stopped to help. He put the youngster in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed to it and said, 'You can let me out now. This is my church. I can always find my way home from church.'"

Lamott continues, “And that is why I have stayed so close to my church, because no matter how lost I am, or lonely or frightened – or just feeling down – when I see the faces of the people at my church, when I hear their familiar voices, I can always find my way home.”

There's an almost odd interplay in this morning's gospel passage between the tangible – like home – and the intangible; between the concrete and the ineffable. Jesus begins by invoking something very tangible: "In my Father's house are many rooms." When pressed about just where this home is and how to get there, he slips into intangibility – that which cannot be perceived with the senses. He effectively says that *he* is this home. "I am the way, the truth, the life."

Then he does it again. He goes back to the concrete: "Now you know the Father – this Creator God long associated with the Hebrew people through Abraham, Moses, David; the prophets. This is the One from whom you have stood far off in reverence; in fear; never quite knowing whether you were welcome or not. Now you know the Father." Very tangible. Again, he's pressed: "Show us the Father." Just as before, he slips from concrete language into the ineffable: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

This is a dance between what is material and what is immaterial; between what is seen and unseen. It certainly is a discourse between what we take to be logical, straight-forward and rational; and what isn't. This does not mean that matters of faith or spirit are *irrational*. We need a different word. How about "non-rational"?

It is non-rational to love those who hate you – your enemies – but this is what Jesus tells us to do. To pray for them; to wish them well and call down God's blessings upon them are also part of his agenda. It is non-rational to tithe – give ten percent of what you earn – to God. In fact, it is counter-intuitive. If you want to have a greater net worth, you need to hold on to your money, not give it away.

Those of us who have embraced such practices and many more have found much greater satisfaction in life. We have found a home in God.

Like our tangible homes – the ones made of brick and mortar – our spiritual homes need maintaining. And nothing maintains our spiritual life like prayer.

Theologian, writer and Roman Catholic priest Henri Nouwen, who passed away in 1996, says that Christians have to "learn to listen again and again to the voice of love in quiet prayer, and to find there the wisdom and courage" we need to live lives of grace. For this to happen we must be "rooted in a permanent, intimate relationship with Jesus."[[1]](#footnote-1)

Nouwen assures us that if we are so rooted in "personal intimacy with the Source of Life, then it is possible to remain flexible without being relativistic; convinced without being rigid; willing to confront without being offensive; gentle and forgiving without being soft; and true witnesses without being manipulative."[[2]](#footnote-2)

Which of those contrasting pairs speaks most to your life? Here they are again: Be flexible without being relativistic; convinced without being rigid; able to confront without offense; gentle but not soft; a true witness without manipulating. I think the one that speaks the most to me is about being convinced without rigidity and close-mindedness.

It was said of Nouwen when he taught at Yale Divinity School that his office was always crammed with students. People just wanted to be near him. After ten years he left Yale for Harvard where he taught a few years more. Then he famously left his academic career, which had given him a great deal of popular notice and acclaim, in order to live in a community of developmentally disabled men. He was their pastor.

When you have the kind of prayer life Nouwen advises, you aren't a slave to your own ego. You are freed up to serve others, especially those on the margins. You become able to empty yourself in love the way Christ did for us; the way God does every moment – the eternal, never-ending, self-emptying of That Which is Love.

Our true home is with this Love: with God; with Jesus who is preparing a place for us in God's home, in God’s heart. Our true home, then, is not a place, but a relationship in the very heart of God, made possible by Christ.

If Jesus is the Light of the World, then you could say we live in a lighthouse. Anne Lamott says, "Lighthouses don't go running all over an island looking for boats to save; they just stand there shining."[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership,* (Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1989), p.45 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., p.47 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Quote found online [↑](#footnote-ref-3)