

# Sermon Notes

St Mark's Anglican Church  
South Hurstville

Easter 6  
13 May 2007

Preacher  
The Reverend Chris Albany  
Rector

Readings: Acts 16.9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21.10-14, 21.22-22.5; John 14.23-29

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## Coming Home

I want to pick up something that Sue Chambers said last Sunday in her sermon as part of our wonderful celebrations. Wasn't it a great day? Thank you to all who helped to make it so. Sue talked about coming home, and the fact that with each home-coming things are different, things and people have changed – but that also each coming home has been moving and creative. That despite the changes and the challenges there has been something there to assist in her journey to and with God.

I guess I am moved to take up this theme of home-coming by two things. First by Jesus' words in the Gospel passage we have just heard, "Those who love me will keep my word and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them." What does it mean to be "at home" to make our "home" with someone? What is it that makes "home" home?

The second was an article in yesterday's Sydney Morning Herald by Amanda Wilson entitled 'Heaven knows there's hope in sin city' which uses Sydney's response to director and writer Kay Pollak's film 'As it is in Heaven' to reflect on the lack of a sense of connectedness or belonging in Sydney and the search for that sense of community which causes some to make a 'sea-change' in order to try to be more 'at home' where they live.

I quote selective parts of Amanda's article:

*"A growing number of Sydneysiders want to find their city's heart and soul because they see it as a way to avoid the isolation of urban life. Others give up and go the sea change/tree change route in the search for community.*

*The social researcher Hugh Mackay says the film is magic because it's a case study in how to rub along with people you don't like. As Sydney gets more crowded, with more high-density living, the rubbing along well bit makes good sense.*

*I think people are flocking to see As It Is In Heaven because it makes them see what could be better, what could be great about Sydney. The film has a strong message about the power of people working together to throw off old ways – personal and societal – that no longer work.*

*"In understanding Sydney's love affair with his film, it helps to know that Pollak's inspiration was, indeed, love.*

*"When I met my wife 20 years ago, it wasn't the first time I'd been married, but it was the first time in my life I could say 'I love you' and mean it."*

*She sang in a choir, and he would pick her up from rehearsal in the local school every Thursday night. Watching the choirmaster try to get his singers working in harmony set Pollak on his path, talking to choirmasters all over Sweden before writing the script.*

*"Every one of them in different ways told me the same thing: sometimes it happens that we all feel as one body, or that we all feel that our minds are joined, or that we feel connected to God or that everyone feels full of love. That is the universal thing about choirs - when we are in a group and free from fear, we all feel love." [(Looking at the St Mark's choir) so that's why you do what you do!]*

*Much of the film's drama comes from the battle between Daniel's means of getting the choir on song and the pastor's loathing of it. There's a memorable line in the film where the pastor, a terrible controlling prig of a man, tells his wife to ask God for forgiveness. She fires back at him: "God doesn't forgive; He has never condemned."*

*Pollak says if we want to understand his film, it's all in that line: "The idea that absolute, complete love doesn't condemn."*

*The lesson for me was how to take control of your life by working with others to enrich and empower the experience of living.*

*Could this be what Sydney is learning as it flocks - in some cases three and four times over - to see Pollak's work of love? That we love our town, but we're looking for a way to connect and harmonise, find some grand sense of coherence. That we want our sea change without having to leave town?"*

In other words we want to feel at home here. Which brings me back to my questions: What does it mean to be 'at home' to make our 'home' with someone? What is it that makes 'home' home?

There is the old saying that home is where the heart is: it's about people and relationships, about love. About the things that really matter, this implies a certain detachment from the things that don't matter. We can so easily get ourselves into a tizz about things that ultimately don't matter in the final scheme of things. It's easy to think that home and house and possessions all go together and so find it hard to move, to down size. There is a Leunig Cartoon which depicts his familiar little man hanging onto a rope high up over an abyss with the caption, "God give us strength. Strength to hold on and strength to let go" One might want to add and the wisdom to know when to do each!

I'd like begin to draw to a close by sharing with you a piece given to me last weekend entitled "Things we Keep" I've forgotten who gave it to me. If it was you let me know. It reads like this.

#### *Things We Keep*

*I grew up in the 40s/50s with practical parents. A mother, God love her, who washed aluminium foil after she cooked in it, then reused it. She was the original recycle queen, before they had a Name for it ... A father who was happier getting old shoes fixed than buying new ones.*

*Their marriage was good, their dreams focused. Their best friends lived barely a wave away. I can see them now, Dad in trousers, tee shirt and a hat and Mom in a house dress, lawn mower in one hand and dish-towel in the other. It was the time for fixing things. A curtain rod, the kitchen radio, screen door, the oven door, the hem in a dress. Things we keep.*

*It was a way of life and sometimes it made me crazy. All that re-fixing, eating. Renewing, I wanted just once to be wasteful. Waste meant affluence. Throwing things away meant you knew there'd always be more.*

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*But then my mother died and on that clear summer's night, in the warmth of the hospital room, I was struck with the pain of learning that sometimes there isn't any more.*

*Sometimes what we care about most gets all used up and goes away ... never to return. So while we have it ... its best we love it ... And care for it ... And fix it when it's broken ... And heal it when it's sick.*

*This is true ... For marriage ... And old cars ... And children with bad report cards ... dogs and cats with bad hips ... And aging parents ... And grandparents. We keep them because they are worth it, because we are worth it. Some things we keep, like a best friend that moved away or a classmate we grew up with.*

*There are just some things that make life important, like people we know who are special ... And so, we keep them close!*

Over the next few months we will be having conversations about things to change here at St Marks. How and in what way can we best refresh our buildings/property/programmes so that we communicate an attractive and positive image? We will need wisdom and discernment to know what to keep and what to change, both in terms of our buildings inside and out and what we do and how we do it.

May we have the grace to know what to hold onto and what to let go!

Those of us who have discovered the difference life in relationship with God makes know that the most important thing to keep close to is God. I find myself resonating to the words of St Augustine 1600+ years ago who addressed God by saying, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” I equate ‘rest’ with ‘being at home’ with there is a sense of comfort and peace. Of security. This rest is not to be equated with inactivity – quite the contrary. Rather it is about being so safe/secure that one is freed to be fully alive. Knowing that God loves us gives us the freedom and courage to express ourselves energetically and freely as we seek to share God’s love and compassion with others. Able to do so because the promise of today’s Gospel is true – and it is not just a distant future oriented promise, but present reality. The promise that our God in Christ comes and makes his home with us – us at home with God and God at home in us.

Blessed be God.