

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

SERMON SERIES: Home, Sweet Home

SERMON TITLE: A Place of Learning and Living

The poet Henry Van Dyke wrote these words:

*I read within a poet's book
A word that starred the page:
"Stone walls do not a prison make,
nor iron bars a cage!"*

*Yes, that is true; and something more
You'll find, where'er you roam,
That marble floors and gilded walls
Can never make a home.*

*But every house where Love abides,
And Friendship is a guest,
Is surely home, and home-sweet-home:
For there the heart can rest.¹*

Home, sweet home is a phrase that I'm sure all of us know. It speaks to a longing of the human heart to find rest in such things as love and friendship. And so over these next weeks, we'll be looking to the scriptures to help us paint a more detailed picture of what *home, sweet home* actually looks like.

So we begin this morning with the Old Testament in the book of Deuteronomy. God's people are being prepared to enter the Promised Land. But there were problems--there were giants in the land and there were over 40 other people groups already living in the land and each with their own gods to worship. There would be many battles and much anxiety to come.

But a critical component of the strategy to cope with the problems ahead has to do with what takes place in Israelite homes. I'm reading from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. It contains the

¹ Van Dyke, Henry. "A Home Song." *As I Like It*. 30 Aug. 2008. 30 Aug. 2008 <<http://sj-ad-infinity.blogspot.com/2008/08/home-song.html>>.

Shema, a text important to Israel and to Jesus. Listen for the word of God. **SCRIPTURE LESSON.**

It's a funny the kinds of that can come to mind as we ponder a passage of scripture. As I began looking at this morning's text, I kept thinking about two things: I thought about how much my dad loved baseball and I thought of the Kennedy family. Let me explain.

First of all, about my dad's love of baseball: You see, my dad loved baseball so much that he wanted to teach me how to play the game—so he signed me up for Little League—and then we went to work. Beyond the regular practices with the team, every afternoon when my dad got off work, he'd come home, change clothes, and we'd go outside and play catch. Sometimes we would load up in the car and go to the baseball field to work on hitting and fielding. My dad was a diligent teacher when it came to baseball. He wanted me to love the game like he did so we established a regular routine of practice so that I could improve my skills and therefore my enjoyment of the game. I remember to this day the things that he taught me and I've even passed them along to my two boys.

But my dad wasn't so diligent when it came to the things of God. Now don't misunderstand me, I learned so much from dad, especially about how to treat other people. I've said to you before that my dad was one of the most loving people I've ever known—and God was certainly behind that.

And my family certainly introduced me to God. In fact, it was my mom who taught me how to pray regularly using those standard rote prayers of childhood like the Lord's Prayer, *God is great God is good, and Now I lay me down to sleep*—and it was my mom who usually took us to worship and Sunday School.

But beyond that, God wasn't as much a part of our day as baseball was during baseball season or homework was during the school year. We didn't talk about God very much. My dad and I talked more about baseball. We didn't often read the scriptures together. So I think I learned to love God just a little bit in my family. But I don't think I really learned to listen for God; I didn't learn much about how to practice the presence of God day in and day out; and I didn't really learn from my parents how to love God with all my heart and soul and might. And frankly, I don't think I did a very good job in teaching these values to our two boys.

But according to Deuteronomy, this is a significant part of what home, sweet home is all about: ***Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and written them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.***

Now as to the Kennedy family, I was in the sixth grade when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. I can remember just as plain as day exactly what we were doing in class on that November afternoon when the school principle broadcast the radio reports of the assassination over the PA system. It had a profound influence on me and over the years—especially as a history guy—I've done some reading about the Kennedy family. I learned, for example, that President Kennedy's father, Joseph P. Kennedy, turned family mealtimes into seminars and, as one historian put it, ***Public affairs ruled the dinner table.***² You see, Mr. Kennedy was extraordinarily diligent in grooming his children, and especially his sons, for political life—and he certainly succeeded.

² Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr. *Robert Kennedy and His Times*. Volume 1. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978,7.

Now here's the question: What would it take for us to be as diligent in teaching our children how to love God with all their hearts and souls and might as my dad was in teaching me baseball and as Joseph P. Kennedy was in grooming his kids for politics?

Here's an example of how it can happen. It comes from Stephanie Paulsell, a professor of theology at Harvard University. She writes: *When I was a little girl, I used to read psalms every day with my father. He reads six psalms a day and writes down one verse from each in a little notebook, whatever strikes his heart on a particular day. I used to sit in the backyard with him and talk about which verses he might write down. I loved the feeling of handling those holy words with my dad as a child.*³

Home, sweet home is a place of learning and living. God intends for it to be place where we learn each and every day, through word and deed, just how to love God with everything that we are. What can we do to make it happen?

³ Garrett, Susan R. "Beyond Noah's Ark." *The Center for Christian Ethics*. 2003. Baylor University. 30 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.baylor.edu/christianethics/childrenarticlegarrett.pdf>>.