

Throughout the fall, various colleges had their homecoming celebrations. UW-La Crosse held their homecoming celebration the weekend of October 21st. UW-Madison, my alma mater, held theirs the weekend of October 7th. It's a chance for alumni to return to campus and relive their college days. Maybe the visitors watch a football game—usually against an easily beatable opponent.

A feature of homecoming that has gone the way of the dodo bird is the homecoming king and queen. In many cases, it boiled down to a popularity contest, but ideally, the homecoming king and queen would attend various homecoming events and represent the school's values and spirit.

Perhaps as we approach the end of the year, we have a different homecoming in mind: we're looking forward to family coming home or us going to family over the holidays.

We start a new Church Year this Sunday as we enter the Season of Advent. We may be puzzled about this selection of a Gospel reading as we prepare for the birth of Jesus. Isn't this out of order? Yet this Sunday helps to set the pace not only for Advent, but for the entire church year as we see **JESUS, THE HOMECOMING KING, INVITES US ON A JOURNEY BACK HOME.**

That's just the thing about a homecoming, whether it be a school homecoming or coming home for the holidays, I. Homecoming takes you on a journey. If you're going to homecoming, then in a sense, you're not home. Admittedly, many of us call where we live home, but at the same time, we don't have everything we need right at our door: the kids live in the next state over, the old college haunts are on the other side of the state or maybe a different U.S. Region, or mom and dad and home cooking are a 4-hour drive away.

I know that we would love to cut down the travel time and teleport to our destination, but sometimes, we need that journey to help us adjust to the way things are back "home." We love mom and dad, but they do things differently than back home.

There's value in the preparations we make as we prepare for our journey: purchasing our tickets to the football game, making hotel reservations, or loading the trunk. We want to be ready for when we arrive, and not be missing anything when we're there.

Jesus in His ministry was on a journey. Many of the events in the Gospels happened on the road as Jesus went from town to town to announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God through teaching and miracles. Jesus was on a homecoming journey.

The journey indeed started when Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, but it had its homecoming in the arrival to Jerusalem as Jesus would be offered up as a sacrifice for our sins. This Advent, we need to understand that Jesus was born to die.

We too see Jesus and his disciples making preparations for the journey. **“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it.”** Jesus wanted to prove a point in his triumphal entry, to show that He wasn’t just another guy, but the king, the home coming king who is preparing a place for us.

Yeah, it would have been nice for Jesus to have been able to wave a wand, or skip countryside wandering, but we forget the friends He made along the way. **“And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”** Perhaps among the crowd who welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem were His disciples, Blind Bartimaeus whose sight He just restored. John the Evangelist tells us that Lazarus was there. On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus changed the lives of those with whom He interacted: healing the sick, forgiving the guilt stricken, and calling many to follow Him.

So too today, Jesus invites us on a homecoming journey. Certainly, we have salvation as a free gift of God apart from our works, but Jesus is calling us this Advent to follow Him through the twists and turns of the church year as He is prophesied, born, lives, dies, and rises for us. The telling and retelling of these past events has an impact as He promises to be present with us in the Word even now, and in the Sacrament as He touches us with His Body and Blood to forgive, renew, and strengthen.

It would be nice if we could just teleport there, snap our fingers and arrive at spiritual maturity and perfect serenity, but that’s not how it works. Jesus is inviting us on a journey.

Why? II. Homecoming can make you homesick. The irony of homecoming is that, as the saying goes, you can never go home again. Sometimes we get homesick even when we’re home because the same places can be so different. Yes, it’s my alma mater, but all the old buildings are torn down. I don’t remember the students being so weird. Yes, it’s home, but Uncle Nick died of cancer and dad’s losing his memory. Yes, it’s home, but all my friends are in a million directions at dozens of colleges nationwide.

The people in the crowd when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem were homesick even if they lived in Jerusalem their whole life. **“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”** These people welcomed Jesus as a king. They longed for the kingdom of their father David. They were sick of Roman rule. They were sick of paying taxes to Caesar. They longed for the good old days of the rule of King David.

Jesus would not find things in order when He arrived in Jerusalem. He mourned over Jerusalem in these days. He would flip over moneychangers tables. He would confront religious leaders, and ultimately, Jesus, the King Himself, would be crucified by sinful men instead of welcomed as the Lord.

We are a homesick people. We're longing for something more. We live in a society of anxious, depressed, and discontented people. The holidays only seem to ramp up the stress. We know things aren't as they ought to be. Even home doesn't feel like home at times.

As long as we walk this Earth, we are pilgrims and travelers with a destination in mind. Peter tells us, "**Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.**" It is right to feel homesick at times as we know that the kingdom is yet to come. This is our hope during Advent, that Jesus not only was born at Christmas, but He will come again to banish homesickness once and for all.

Yet the end times were established when Jesus died and rose again, we are in the end times, and Jesus isn't far, in fact, He's right here. III. The Homecoming King takes us home. Yeah, it may be kind of cheesy to refer to Jesus as a Homecoming King, but He is the one chosen by the Father from eternity to represent humanity. He is the one who is taking us home.

This side of eternity we may get glimpses of home as the football team scores the game winning touchdown and cheer alongside old friends and complete strangers. We get glimpses of home as we gather around for Thanksgiving or Christmas with family, and even though things aren't as they used to be, even right now is kind of nice.

Although Jesus never lived in Jerusalem, it was the setting for many important events in His life including His dedication in the temple and his many Passover pilgrimages as a child. He is returning to that important place to fulfill God's plan for Him and for us.

This Advent, Jesus is inviting us homesick sinners into His presence by gathering together as the Church. We gather for worship to be in the presence of Jesus Himself as we join in the song of the Palm Sunday crowds, "**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**" as we sing the sanctus. He is coming to us even now as He prepares us for our eternal destination.

Even better than a high school or college homecoming, or even the best holiday family reunion, Jesus is inviting us into the presence of fellow pilgrims as we join Him on the way home. We may not look like much, but we join as a church family to be strengthened by the Son of David. Whether it's just been several days or several years Every Sunday we can say to those who are back for worship, welcome home. Indeed, welcome home, and join us on the journey through the Church Year Jesus through which Jesus wants to lead us.