Harmony

I don’t get back to my hometown very often. When I do, it’s typically for a funeral. As a matter of fact, I believe the last time I traveled home was to take my parents to the funeral of a family member.

One of the things we always do is a “house tour.” No, we’re not looking to buy real estate, but we do drive by all the significant houses in our personal history. The house my father was born in. The house his parents moved their young family to and lived in until their deaths. The house where my mother’s parents moved with their three teen-aged children and also lived the rest of their days. The house my brother and I were raised in and where my parents lived for thirty years. The house I married into and where our daughters grew up.

Every year, we drive by each house, pull over to the side of the street, and just look for a few minutes before we’re all ready to drive on. Each house is still well cared for. Each looks the same, yet different. New colors, new plantings, old trees cut down, new fencing. My one grandmother’s garden is gone. At the other grandmother’s house there we see a man training grape vines around a new stone pillar.

Sitting across the street from these houses, I experience a mixture of emotion and memory: holidays and Sunday dinners and cheese sandwiches; bringing home friends who were always welcomed as if they were family; conversations; card games; football with cousins and arguments over the rules; parents helping with homework; campouts in the backyard; observing the grownups; learning; being.

The church that is addressed in Hebrews almost certainly met in a home. Homes are the locus of our life together, where we learn how to live with other people, how to relate in good times and bad. When to be patient and persevere. How to extend hospitality. Rejoicing and weeping with each other’s successes and losses.

Memories of our homes remain with us for a long time, if not forever. Those memories, those experiences, make us who we are. That’s exactly why we’re charged to make our homes (and churches and communities) places where the good outweighs the difficult. Where apologies and forgiveness are freely given and received, where harmony doesn’t mean perfection or uniformity, but different characters and voices blending together to nourish each other. Where strangers aren’t just welcomed, but become part of the family.

Whenever I do my hometown house tour, I remember the harmony of all those different homes and lives.

No home, no faith community, no neighborhood is perfect, but we’re charged to live in harmony, and to let our love for each other be genuine. The music we make together reaches into our hearts and memories and pulls us together in peace and love.

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