**Are You Going Home for Christmas?**

Friday December 20, 2013

[The Rev. Frederick Buechner](https://day1.org/speakers/5d9b820ef71918cdf200356f/view)  
Organization: Frederick Buechner Center  
Denomination: Presbyterian Church (USA)

Here are three excerpts from Buechner's sermon "The Longing for Home", first published in The Longing for Home and again in Secrets in the Dark:

Home sweet home. There's no place like home. Home is where you hang your hat, or, as a waggish friend of mine once said, Home is where you hang yourself. "Home is the sailor, home from sea, / And the hunter home from the hill." What the word home brings to mind before anything else, I believe, is a place, and in its fullest sense not just the place where you happen to be living at the time, but a very special place with very special attributes that make it clearly distinguishable from all other places. The word home summons up a place-more specifically a house within that place-that you have rich and complex feelings about, a place where you feel, or did feel once, uniquely at home, which is to say a place where you feel you belong and that in some sense belongs to you, a place where you feel that all is somehow ultimately well even if things aren't going all that well at any given moment. To think about home eventually leads you to think back to your childhood home, the place where your life started, the place that off and on throughout your life you keep going back to, if only in dreams and memories, and that is apt to determine the kind of place, perhaps a place inside yourself, that you spend the rest of your life searching for even if you are not aware that you are searching. I suspect that those who as children never had such a place in actuality had instead some kind of dream of such a home, which for them played an equally crucial part

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It was toward the middle of December, I think, that [George Buttrick] said something in a sermon that has always stayed with me. He said that on the previous Sunday, as he was leaving the church to go back to the apartment where he lived, he happened to overhear somebody out on the steps asking somebody else, ''Are you going home for Christmas?" and I can almost see Buttrick with his glasses glittering in the lectern light as he peered out at all those people listening to him in that large, dim sanctuary and asked it again'' Are you going home for Christmas?"-and asked it in some sort of way that brought tears to my eyes and made it almost unnecessary for him to move on to his answer to the question, which was that home, finally, is the manger in Bethlehem, the place where at midnight even the oxen kneel.

Home is where Christ is was what Buttrick said that winter morning, and when the next autumn I found myself to my great surprise putting aside whatever career I thought I might have as a writer and going to Union Seminary instead at least partly because of the tears that kept coming to my eyes, I don't believe that I consciously thought that home was what I was going there in search of, but I believe that was the truth of it.

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Those are some of the places the search has taken me, and what can I honestly say I have found along the way? I think the most I can claim is something like this. I receive maybe three or four hundred letters a year from strangers who tell me that the books I have spent the better part of my life writing have one way or another saved their lives, in some cases literally. I am deeply embarrassed by such letters. I think, if they only knew that I am a person more often than not just as lost in the woods as they are, just as full of darkness, in just as desperate need. I think, if I only knew how to save my own life. They write to me as if I am a saint, and I wonder how I can make clear to them how wrong they are.

But what I am beginning to discover is that, in spite of all that, there is a sense in which they are also right. In my books, and sometimes even in real life, I have it in me at my best to be a saint to other people, and by saint I mean life-giver, someone who is able to bear to others something of the Holy Spirit, whom the creeds describe as the Lord and Giver of Life. Sometimes, by the grace of God, I have it in me to be Christ to other people. And so, of course, have we all-the life-giving, life-saving, and healing power to be saints, to be Christs, maybe at rare moments even to ourselves.

I believe that it is when that power is alive in me and through me that I come closest to being truly home, come closest to finding or being found by that holiness that I may have glimpsed in the charity and justice and order and peace of other homes I have known, but that in its fullness was always missing. I cannot claim that I have found the home I long for every day of my life, not by a long shot, but I believe that in my heart I have found, and have maybe always known, the way that leads to it. I believe that Buttrick was right and that the home we long for and belong to is finally where Christ is. I believe that home is Christ's kingdom, which exists both within us and among us as we wend our prodigal ways through the world in search of it.