

[PRAYER] [BLANK] It’s good to see you this morning. I hope that you’ve had a good week. I had kind of a busy week, with not one particular thing occupying my time, but quite a few things taking me here, there, and everywhere. I’ve had long days and nights, and on Wednesday night, after my faith group time in East Berlin, I struggled through the rain to make it home. It was raining pretty hard all the way home, and, like the stubborn bug that I am sometimes, I was trying not to put on the defogger, so that my electric car motor could run on the battery as much as possible, instead of gas, and that made the drive less assuring. I knew that there was a road out there, but sometimes I had a hard time seeing it.

Well, I took my time, and made it home safely. I knew that I was home, because June-Ann always puts on the porch lights at night. Those porch lights are her welcome to me, her reminder that she is waiting for me to come home. She does the same for our son Christopher, making sure that the hallway is lit, when he comes home late from work. She relies on us coming home; we rely on her being there; and when her semester of teaching starts, she relies on us being there, ready to greet her.

We are blessed to have that kind of care for one another in our little family. We don’t do many fancy things for one another, but we try to pay attention to the little things that make a difference. We rely on one another to provide those things. So, when I come up the hill to our house, I have an assurance in my mind and heart that I will see those lamps lit, and that covenant love is waiting for me in the house where they shine.

Now, imagine a home that is even better than our home, or your home, or any home on earth. Imagine a home with porch lights that shine as far as anyone can see, and then some. Imagine that those porch lights are so well made that they will never burn out. Right now, I have two different light bulbs on our porch lights, and they look kind of funny together, because one burnt out, and I couldn’t find a matching bulb. That doesn’t happen in this home that is better than any home on earth. All of the lights are original equipment, shining as brightly as the day that they were first turned on.

[BUTLER] And now, let’s imagine that you are a servant in this most perfect home. It’s not your own home; you just work there. But you are so grateful to be in that home. You have the most perfect employer, you love their family, and you feel privileged just to be there for them. You have a roof over your head, there is covenant love everywhere, and you are so grateful for all of this, that you cannot wait for your boss to come home. So you light the lamps, and wait, ready for action. Because you rely on your boss for your joy, like your own life; the joy of relying on the one you serve is who you are. [BLANK]

My siblings in Christ, my family of faith, welcome to that home. The home of God is here. No, it’s not this building, though it is beautiful, to be sure. We have no idea what God’s house really looks like. Our church buildings just tell the story of what we hope that God’s house will look like. No, the home of God on earth is what God’s people known as the church do to be like God. Just like the quality of the light bulbs in our porch lamps don’t really reflect the quality of my family’s love for me, this building is just a place for God’s love and care to be shared with one another. If home is where the heart is, God’s

home is where God’s heart lives in people who are ready to serve everyone God’s perfect love. We are meant to be the servants of that perfect home. We are meant to be ready to serve our God with that joy, lit by the lamps of God’s love.

Where is God’s home on earth? Where God’s perfect love is served, through us, God’s servants. God relies on us to play that role as God’s church, in Jesus Christ. And God loves us relying on God so much that God is ready to offer us radical hospitality for those who serve God on God’s earth. In Luke’s gospel reading today, Jesus tells us about how God will serve the people who rely on serving God. God knows that the servants of God have been working hard, keeping lamps of faith lit, ready for action, and waiting a long time. And when God comes home, Jesus promises us that God will tell God’s servants, who rely on serving God to be who they are, “Come on, pull up a chair, and sit down. Let me serve you tonight.”

It isn’t always easy to serve God like this, is it? It isn’t easy to rely on serving God as the very definition of who we are. All things being equal, many of us would be just as happy to put on some comfy clothes and slippers, and park ourselves in front of the TV with our favorite shows or movies, or fiddle around the house or garden. I slip too, sometimes. The other day I started my breakfast, put one bite into my mouth, and then realized, “Oh, my goodness, I didn’t say grace for this food!” I was so embarrassed. It just wasn’t who I was. I try to say grace for every bite that I take, not just at home, but in public places, because I rely on serving the God who serves me so much in my heart. I don’t want to be anyone else, if I can possibly help it.

There was a woman named Agnes who came to rely completely on serving God for who she was. Her church where she found the God who served her was not in a building. It was in the streets of a city. Agnes was a teacher, and one day, while she was going to a meeting with other teachers, she looked at the poor people in the streets of her city. She saw so many people who did not have a home, or even the hope of a home, and who would never know that God was ready to serve them on earth as if they were already home with God. She knew that these people were her church, the people who she needed to serve with God’s covenant love, in body, in mind, and in spirit. And so she did.

[MOTHER] We know Agnes by the name that she took to serve God’s people on earth, relying on God for everything to help them. Mother Teresa had no hope of fulfilling God’s call to her by her own power in the streets of Calcutta. But by the power of God serving her, as God’s servant in Christ, God’s miracle of covenant love came to earth. [BLANK]

In this place, at this time, there are many people who do not have a home. Some come to the doors of our church, looking for some way to find a home. Others come to Unity House, hoping to have a temporary home among people served by God. And some we meet in the home that is God’s world, where they are, and how they are. Often where and how they are is not very pretty, at all. My heart breaks when I think of young people who I have served on the Berlin Turnpike, in motel rooms where they have sold their bodies, just to have a place to stay for a night. I remember the deep wounds on the hands of a refugee from Iraq, that appeared whenever he was overwhelmed with the stress of

remembering how he had to avoid being killed by agents of ISIS in his home country. And I remember the homes and hospital rooms that I visit, serving people who have little hope left but to rely on going home to their God.

They can rely on God’s love to welcome them home. And so can we, right now. Who we hold on to becomes the source of our joy. Who we worship becomes our master. And who we can hold on to as our master, through faith in Jesus Christ, is a master who sets us all free to find God’s joy, the joy of discovering who we are really meant to be. We are meant to be people who define themselves by serving the one who serves us perfectly. There is not one thing out of place in God’s house. God’s love makes it all perfect, and God invites us to help God’s earth look like God’s home. Everything is taken care of for the servants of God who rely on God, and God alone, to do this, in Christ.

I want this to be a joyful church. God wants this to be a joyful church. We all want this to be a joyful church, together. And for this to be a joyful church, we need to discover in our hearts how relying on the God who serves us perfectly in Jesus sets us free to find God’s joy. God asks us to commit to God’s joy. God asks us to focus on God’s joy. God asks us to trust God’s joy. Are we ready to take a bigger leap than that, to find God’s joy, as God’s church, in Christ? Are we ready not just to serve food to perfect strangers who need to be touched by God’s church, but to serve God’s perfect love in Jesus, relying on Jesus as the source of our strength? Are we ready for the church not to be this building, but a people united in service to God, to one another, and to God’s world, to make God’s home on earth appear before us all? I hope so. I pray so. And, by God’s grace, we will help one another to keep our lamps lit, and to be ready for action, that relies on God’s joy. Amen.