

The Home You Grew Up In
January 16, 2022 – Xema Whitley

The home you grew up in. Can you picture it? Take a tour with your mind. What room do you go to first? The bedroom where you may have studied, or whispered to a sibling in the dark? A porch or step where you watched stars or sunsets? A kitchen where you were sent to wash the dishes when it wasn't fair and it wasn't your turn? A table where meals were eaten, laughter was shared and ideas debated? The house you immediately pictured may not have been where you were born. The house you GREW UP in may be quite different from where you were born.

We all GROW UP in different ways both in the physical homes we occupy and the emotional ones. We certainly grow up differently spiritually as well. I was told by the pediatrician when my two daughters were young that "every child develops differently at their own pace." We all GROW UP at a different pace too. Some of us had to take on big responsibilities at young ages. Some of us continue to shake our heads when we realize we are STILL growing up in certain ways... still fighting the same old battles and still wondering "will I ever outgrow this?"

Some people never seem to GROW UP and take responsibility for their choices and how their actions impact others. It's hard to GROW UP and go out into the world, learn lessons, encounter temptations, and then return HOME.

Jesus did that in the Scripture from Luke today. The story starts out describing that he returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. Do you remember where he was returning from? From his journey in the desert for 40 days where he had to make HARD choices to GROW UP. To resist temptation and take responsibility for his choices... he set boundaries with evil and said ... NO, I am not serving You or following your ways. I will not even entertain your ideas. I choose the thoughts of God over YOU, Evil in this world. And then he returned home. Something MUST have been noticeably different because "news of him spread through the whole countryside". And he was "in the power of the Spirit ... when he taught in the synagogues, and EVERYONE PRAISED HIM." THAT IS A GOOD DAY!

You've got the power of the Spirit oozing all out of you to the point that Luke – who was known to be a doctor – notices it... and writes in down in his book about you... .AND when you teach among the scholars and leaders in your community – not just a few think “hey – that kid's okay”. BUT EVERYONE PRAISES YOU. Wow. That's a hard level of success to maintain!

About that time, I'll bet many of his hometown friends thought. “That Jesus is a ROCK STAR – he can't do anything wrong... this guys on a roll...”. UNTIL, Jesus goes into the synagogue and asks for the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolls the words to him that were already over 700 years old and says them... “The Spirit of the Lord is on me.” (*I can hear the townspeople in my imagination saying... yes – the whole hometown has noticed THAT*). Because he has anointed me. (*Yes – that make sense, give glory to God who gives you this anointing – a very good Jewish boy thing to say...*) He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind (*Yes – yes – we know the lovely words of Isaiah*)..to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (*And the townspeople give one of the classic head tilts of Scripture – the kind that happens when someone goes – huh? Did I just hear you correctly? YOU are the one to fulfill this 700+ year old prophecy? I mean we like you and all Jesus, but - Huh? You're just a hometown boy with big dreams that just finished a great wilderness adventure??*

And Jesus goes on to say some more things that greatly upset the balance of power for the people in his hometown – to the point that in verse 29 it says “they got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill... in order to THROW HIM DOWN THE CLIFF.” I ask you – are these the same place where EVERYONE was PRAISING Him just a day or two before? Human beings are confusing, are they not? I'm so glad God loves us.

So this brings me to another story of a young boy and his hometown. This young man grew up at 501 Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia. He lived in a large, lovely house with his sister and brother, mother, father, and beloved Grandmother. Let me give you a quick tour of his home:



Here's the front porch which wraps around to a side porch. From this porch, the family could see small one-story houses to the left for those with lower incomes. To the right, were bigger two-story homes for more middle-income people. His home was large enough to house guests whenever his family knew someone needed a place to stay.

When you enter the house, there is a banister that our young friend liked to slide down. In fact, one day he didn't notice his grandmother was at the bottom and he knocked her out cold. Believing she was dead; he ran upstairs and threw himself out a window. Both survived and their strong love for each other endured.

There's a beautiful sitting room with a piano that was played often although our young friend didn't like to practice, but we will go directly to the dining room.



Here, before anyone could eat, each child had to recite a Bible verse. Our young friend was pretty smart, because he found the shortest verse in the Bible he could find to recite: John 11:35, "Jesus wept." He used that one often!

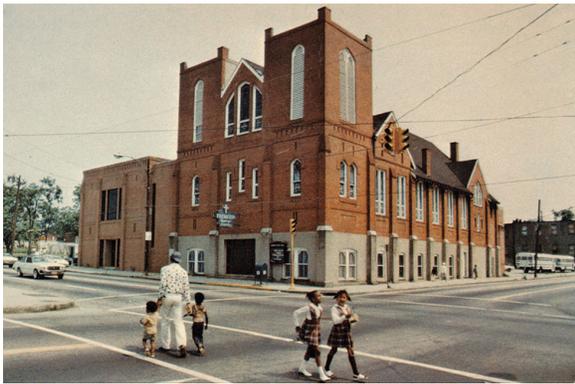


Back here is the kitchen where he hated doing dishes, but he loved eating ice cream.



Upstairs is his bedroom he shared with his brother and down there on the floor you'll notice games. One of his favorite board games was Monopoly. His sister slept downstairs, and she remembers that her brother sometimes popped the heads off HER dolls to use them as baseballs!!

Have you figured out who our friend is yet? Here's another clue: The whole family would walk down the street to go to church where this boy's father and grandfather were preachers.



It's called Ebenezer Baptist and here's a picture. And even though he got a "C" once in public speaking class, ML (as his family called him) ended up becoming one of the most famous preachers in the world... and much like it says in Isaiah, this boy became a man that preached good news to the poor, worked to set captives free and release the oppressed.



I have come to deeply admire this man named Martin Luther King Jr. and have walked in his footsteps in the neighborhood called "Sweet Auburn." For ten years, I led trips with Church of the Messiah's Confirmation class through Atlanta as part of our Christian Heritage Trip.

We would spend an afternoon touring the National Historic Site that is the preserved neighborhood that includes ML's childhood home, the local fire station, the historic Ebenezer Baptist church and the modern building that houses the current Ebenezer Baptist congregation.

His sister Christine still attends there and can be seen in a center front pew often wearing a stylish hat. You can hear the fantastic gospel choir warm up if you get there 30 minutes early as they advise groups to do to make sure you can get seats together. The survey at the end of our Confirmation Heritage Trip often revealed that worshiping at Ebenezer Baptist was one of the highlights for the Middle School participants.

So why do I love showing young people the home Martin Luther King Jr. grew up in? One detail I remember the Tour Guides telling us while standing on the front porch of MLK JR's house was that Martin grew up with various levels of income in his neighborhood. Yes, the neighborhood was segregated as all African Americans, but within that neighborhood were various levels of income, ability and education - all living close by, in harmony and within the visual landscape each time Martin left his home. I can't help but believe that influenced and informed his desire to serve, respect and bring justice to all people. And every time I led a tour through the neighborhood, I trusted the youth that walked the paths ML walked could see themselves in his shoes - his playful side, his humanity, his courage, and his desire to improve the world around him.

How is God using the story of the home you grew up in? No home or parent is perfect and there is always pain to deal with in our pasts. But part of my personal theology is that God can redeem anything and anyone and when you sink into the deep but simple fact that GOD IS WITH US... through it all... fear lessens and courage bubbles up to help us GROW UP.

God was with Martin as he played and grew in the hot Atlanta sunshine. God was with Martin as he called out the realities of injustice and oppression. God was with Martin when his life was cut short on the balcony of his Memphis hotel.

God was with Jesus as he learned and loved with Mary and Joseph in their humble home in Galilee. God strengthened the human moral courage of Jesus as he learned to fight great temptation. God was right there as Jesus cried out Abba Father on the cross where Redemption was crafted out of flesh.

And... God was with you as you walked the hallways of your childhood. God is with us as we GROW UP and realize we can all be trapped by our own limitations as well as those imposed on us. We can all relate to feeling oppressed and needing to be free. All of us can be a part of driving out darkness with light. All of us can add more love to the world so the hate dissipates. We don't do any of this alone. God is with us. Even though we may be years from the Home We Grew Up In, the best of that home's influence is something we carry with us.

... whatever is good from that home... Whatever is true. Whatever is lovely...we carry that with us... and as we have been broken and redeemed... so too can others find that same hope of healing in us... and together we can walk without fear to be that light of freedom, justice and healing.

Amen.