

June 21, 2026
Lectionary 12, Year A
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 10:24-39
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Come Back Home

When I'm working at my desk, I usually have music playing. I have always had what I would call unusual musical tastes, from the time I was a teenager, listening to musical theater cast albums when so many of my peers were listening to the top 40 on the radio. I still love musical theater, but I supplement my listening with hymns and contemporary Christian worship music. I also follow a few choirs, and composers and enjoy listening to anything that they produce.

I listen to music on YouTube, which I have learned shows my age, putting up with the ads for the benefit of not having to think much about it. YouTube's algorithm creates a mix for me; a mix of choral groups, hymns, and praise and worship music, and it can keep me going all day.

Now, obviously, when I'm listening to music at my desk, I'm working, not watching YouTube videos. YouTube is almost always running in the background when I'm working at my computer, so I can hear the music, hopefully tune out the ads, and work on whatever I need to work on, research, lesson plans, meeting agendas, emails, emails, emails, emails, schedules, etcetera. But every once in a while a song will catch my notice, and I'll decide to give myself a break and watch the video that goes with it. Which is how I ran into one particular video, from a group called Musicality. The song that they were singing came up in my randomized play list enough times that I finally decided I wanted to see who was singing and get a better idea of what they were singing. So, I stopped whatever I was doing and watched the video.

Musicality is a group based out of a high school in Chicago that gained national attention after their top 21 appearance on America's Got Talent. Musicality began as an after-school singing group started by a music teacher who saw so much passion and talent in his group of students he decided to do something extra with them. The after school group that he started became Musicality after the students that started it graduated from high school. A write up of Musicality says, "That group became Musicality, a safe haven where students could express themselves through music. Musicality even became a second family for many of the members." (<https://www.faith-forward.net/musicality>) I learned all of that after I watched the video and researched the group.

The song they were singing was a song from the movie musical, *The Greatest Showman*, called *From Now On*. It really was a beautiful arrangement of an inspiring song, but what really struck me about it was the juxtaposition of the words of the song and the setting in which the group of young people were singing it. The song began like a ballad, sung by various soloists from the group, backed by quiet oos from the rest of the group and then by piano and guitar and drum. But then the chorus started, and the group began these words singing in exuberant harmony,

And we will come back home

And we will come back home

Home, again!

And we will come back home

And we will come back home

Home, again!

And we will come back home

And we will come back home

Home, again!

*From now on
These eyes will not be blinded by the lights!
From now on!
What's waited 'til tomorrow starts tonight!
It starts tonight!
Let this promise in me start
Like an anthem in my heart
From now on
From now on
From now on
And we will come back home
And we will come back home
Home, again!*

(Excerpt from *From Now On* from *The Greatest Showman*)

Let me tell you where this group of 20 somethings were while they were singing about coming home. They were in a deconstructed church. It looked like a church that was being converted from a place of worship to a worship space, or perhaps a private home.

The young people were singing in what looked like it had once been the sanctuary, the space where you all are sitting and a choir loft, looking down on what had been the nave of the church. And high above them were stained glass windows and high rafters, and a cupola, with paintings of scriptural scenes all around it. The space looked like it was in between being one thing, a church, a place of worship, and whatever it was becoming. The scriptural scenes, the pictures of saints and angels, looked like they were just a meaningless backdrop, someone's interesting architectural aesthetic to the music that the young people were singing, young people of different races, different religions, or for many, probably, no

religion at all, different cultures, different life experiences. The song and the video is beautiful and inspiring, and troubling and hopeful.

On Friday, we had a gathering of young adults in our congregation to brainstorm ideas for what kind of ministry people in that age group would be interested in doing or seeing in a church. We started the conversation by talking about what they thought might be keeping people their age out of the church. After all, we have 25 18-30 year olds in our congregation, on our membership rolls, who still live in the area, nearby enough to get to worship on a Sunday morning, but you have probably noticed that there aren't 25 18-30 year olds who are attending worship here in person on Sundays. They aren't on Zoom either.

And I know many of those 18-30 year olds pretty well, and I don't think that they have decided they hate the church. They just don't come to church.

The young people who gathered on Friday nights had a lot of ideas about that. And they mostly talked about the reputation the church has in the culture around them, with people their age, as a place that says, all are welcome, but doesn't really mean it. A place where people are expected to conform in terms of belief and lifestyle and sometimes even politics before they are truly welcome, truly included, truly accepted.

They all said that they didn't believe that their church was like that, they all said that their experience of the church was different from that, that they had experienced the church as a place of love and true welcome, but that it was hard to share that with others. Because they felt that once you told someone that you were a practicing Christian, once you mentioned your faith or your church, you were labeled, stereotyped as one kind of person, hateful, exclusionary, rigid, controlling, immature.

Not good. Not good at all if even the young people in our congregation who are committed to showing up at church, for worship, for fellowship, even for a brainstorming session about how to do ministry for and with people their age,

talked about how far the church had fallen in the collective imaginations of young adults in their social and work circles, from the vision of love that reaches beyond cultural and religious rules and boundaries that we find in Jesus' teachings and actions.

But Jesus warned us that it would be like that. In our gospel reading for today, we hear Jesus saying that the road will not be easy for those who want to follow him. The world maligned Jesus, they called him names, they said that he was the Beezebul, the king of demons. How much more will they malign those who follow him? (Matthew 10:25)

Jesus warned that people would judge us for following him, even members of our own families might reject us for following Jesus. (Matthew 10:35-36)

He warned his disciples, and in warning them he warned us that following him might make us misunderstood by the world around us, by our peers, friends, and colleagues. And he told us to hold fast, to be true, to proclaim Jesus in the light, to proclaim Jesus from the housetops, risky though it might be. (Matthew 10:27)

Because the world needs to hear what we have to say. The world needs to know what we have found, which has been so covered up by so many expressions of the church.

A group of young people sang a song in a shutdown church, that was no longer a place of worship, standing under a stained-glass cross, with paintings of saints and angels, staring down at them with sightless eyes, and unhearing ears. But we can hear them. They were singing about trying different things in their lives, chasing the things of this world and finding them lacking.

Listen to the words they were singing:

I saw the sun begin to dim

And felt that winter wind blow cold

*A man learns who is there for him
When the glitter fades and the walls won't hold
'Cause from then, rubble
What remains
Can only be what's true
If all was lost
There's more I gained
'Cause it led me back
To you
From now on
These eyes will not be blinded by the lights
From now on
What's waited 'til tomorrow starts tonight
Tonight
Let this promise in me start
Like an anthem in my heart
From now on
From now on
I drank champagne with kings and queens
The politicians praised my name
But those are someone else's dreams
The pitfalls of the man I became
For years and years
I chased their cheers
The crazy speed of always needing more
But when I stop
And see you here
I remember who all this was for*

*And from now on
These eyes will not be blinded by the lights
From now on
What's waited 'til tomorrow starts tonight
It starts tonight
And let this promise in me start
Like an anthem in my heart
From now on
From now on
From now on
And we will come back home
And we will come back home
Home, again!*

*(Excerpt from *From Now On* from *The Greatest Showman*)*

They were singing about trying all of the things that the world has to offer and finding them lacking. They were singing about being lost in a world that only embraces, only celebrates the illusion of who we are and not who we really are. They were singing about the crazy speed of always needing more. And they were singing about coming home.

And I wonder what we can do to make them know that there is a home for them here. There is a home for them in the God who has counted every hair of their heads (Matthew 10:30). There is a home for them in the God who knows every sparrow that falls (Matthew 10:29). There is a home for them in the God who knows all of our secrets, who know all that we try to cover up, and who loves us enough to live for us, to die for us, to give us to each other in a community that is there for us from birth to death and then beyond. There is a home and a life that is there for us all us, a home and a life we can experience as we lay down the life

that the world says we need, that we have to have, and lose ourselves in Jesus, in his life, in his body, the church. This is a home for all of us, a home Jesus calls us to, where we find true family, where all really are welcome, and where we can all come back home. Home again. Amen.