



CLOSE to
HOME

poetry prayers Advent | Year C

Poetry prayers by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

There are a number of ways to utilize poetry in your ministry. You might print and distribute these prayers to members in your community, or read them aloud to open and close study sessions. In worship, you could offer a poem as an opening reflection, a meditation during the sermon, a moment of reflection after the sermon, or as a written prayer printed in the bulletin. However you utilize these poems, please include credit as follows:

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The First Sunday of Advent

Homesick (HOPE) | Luke 21:25-36

Homesick

How do you describe homesickness to a child?
You don't.
They know.
Children know the feeling of being away from home.
It's fear, dipped in loneliness,
that "What if I've been forgotten?" sonnet,
or the "What if I can't go back?" refrain.
Even a healthy, scrubbed-clean,
showered-with-love child
knows the longing of home.

But if I *had* to.
If I had to describe
that aching feeling, I would say:
"Homesickness is when longing and grief
wrap themselves around you like a blanket.
It's the door to comfort thrown open.
It's an eye on the horizon for what could be
and the only way out is to keep walking,
to keep dreaming,
to keep looking
for signs that will point you back home."

And if you tell that to a child,
you just may realize
that a part of your spirit
has shoes on
and has always been walking,
always been dreaming,
always been looking
for the home that could be.

The door to comfort has been blown open.
Tell God I'm homesick.
I'm on my way.



The Second Sunday of Advent

Laying the Foundation (Peace) | Luke 1:57-80

WORDS FOR THE BEGINNING

If I could give you words
for the very beginning—
for the stretches
and the yawns,
and the opening of eyes,
for the first hiccups,
and the first smiles,
and the first purse of your lips,
I would say,
“Oh, dear child,
how you are loved.”

But the thing about love
is you can't stop there,
so I would go on to say,
“You are strong,
stronger than you think.
And you are not alone—
look at these parents who adore you
and these doctors and nurses fighting for you.
And you are enough, already enough.

You haven't done anything yet.
You've just been here,
breathing,
sleeping,
and already, you are enough.
And then I might say,
“This world is a mess,
but it is your home,
and you can make it better,
so always try to make it better.

And maybe most important of all:
there is a love
that is bigger than my understanding,
that moves through this world,
and I call that love God.
And that love is here,
here in this room,
and that love knows
your name by heart.”

Those are the words I would say to you
as you stretch and yawn and open your eyes
on the very first morning
of your very first day.
Let that be your foundation,
like Zechariah did for John.
Let love be your beginning.



The Third Sunday of Advent

A HOME FOR ALL (JOY) | Luke 3:1-18

ADVOCATING FOR HOME

Written with love for all who identify as transgender and/or non-binary.

I know you don't feel at home in your body.

Your clothes don't feel right.

Your bones don't feel right.

Your name, just a word that people have labeled you with.

I see the way you try on pronouns like I try on clothes,
looking for something—*anything*—that feels right.

And what I would give to build you a shelter—

a safe space where you could be,

a home where you were safe and free.

What I would give to carve out some room

for you to process and grieve

and dance and sing your way

into your true self.

But I know

it's not that easy.

My hands cannot build you safety.

My words cannot give you time.

My heart cannot be home enough.

So until the day when you are truly at home,

I will keep marching for you.

I will keep advocating for the home you deserve—

the home in your own skin.

I will keep praying.

I will give you my second coat,

and the shirt off my back, and the food from my table.

I won't give up on preparing the way.

A voice is calling out in the wilderness.

Do you hear it?

There's more for us here than has been before.



The Fourth Sunday of Advent

seeking sanctuary (love) | Luke 1:39-55

come on home

We all know the feeling—
the shaky ground,
sinking sand,
water-is-rising,
sun-is-fading feeling
that makes steady breathing
an entire miracle,
and holding back tears
a marvel in and of itself.

And when those days come,
I call my parents.
And I call my church,
and I call my friends,
and they say in unison
what God has said
from the very beginning,
which is, “Come on home.”

Is there anything more healing
than an open door?
If you’re seeking sanctuary,
if the waters are rising—
listen.
It may be hard to hear,
but God is always saying,
“Come on home.”



INVITATIONS

I've been thinking about a universal truth—the way we all want to be invited in. We want the door to be opened with cheers of, “You're here!” We want the clerk at the store to ask how we're doing, and the waiter to wink at us and whisper, “Good choice.” We want the barista to learn our names, which people call being “a regular,” but it feels more like being known. We want the stranger to help us pick up our sodas when the case breaks, and the woman to put her bag in her lap on the subway, which is to mean, “Come, you can sit by me.” We cherish every open palm wave from the child in the grocery store and every city church with open doors when the organist plays.

At the end of the day we are all just a collection of heart and bones walking through this world, exchanging invitations, saying to one another in a million little ways—come matter here. Come make a difference here. Come be you, here.

Jesus didn't receive much of an invitation.
No one moved their bag to their lap, or opened the door to the inn and said, “You're here!”
Still, he came.

What a gift it is
to have a God
who does not wait on my invitation.
What a gift it is
to have a God
who can't imagine
being anywhere but here.



The First Sunday After Christmas
CHOSEN HOME | Luke 2:41-52

CHOSEN HOME

There are a million ways to choose a home.

We choose to make it work.

We hang a wreath on the door of our shoebox apartment.

We invite company over.

We ask, "Would you like coffee with that?"

We choose to make the most of it.

We take up watercoloring or kickboxing and show up to class.

We mostly embarrass ourselves, but we were there.

We choose to not go it alone.

We sign up to volunteer and make ourselves a nametag.

We slide weary bones into weary church pews.

We shake hands and say hello.

We let the music cover us, like a blanket, or a prayer.

We choose to love what we have.

We look in the mirror and speak kindly to our body.

We buy flowers at the market and arrange them in jelly jars.

There are a million ways to choose a home.

So like Jesus in the temple

who chose to stay,

who chose to speak,

who took up space because he knew he was home,

I invite you to do the same.

Put your body

where your soul feels alive.

Give yourself permission

to take up space there.

Stay, as long as it takes.

Return, as often as you need.

There are a million ways to choose a home.

Choose wisely. We need you here.



Epiphany

HOME BY ANOTHER WAY | Matthew 2:1-12

MUSCLE MEMORY

Going home is a form of muscle memory.

Start the car.

Turn on the lights.

Turn left,

turn right.

Pass the big oak tree

and the empty school yard.

Look for the house with the light on.

Look for the house with the open door.

Look for the house that says, "Welcome home."

You'll know when you've arrived—

that's the thing about muscle memory.

I am learning,

muscle memory and faith

are not one and the same.

So I am asking,

Will you start the car?

Will you turn on the lights?

Will you take a deep breath?

It might be time to get lost.

It might be time to find a new way home.

But I am learning things of love,

and home is not home unless all are welcomed,

and muscle memory is not justice unless all are safe.

So I'm asking—

can we start the car

and get totally lost

chasing what is right

far off on the horizon?

Can we drive off the road

and get a flat tire

if it means paving the way

for justice and truth?

Can we circle the trees

and miss the school yard completely

if this new way home

includes space for grace?

Can we waste our time

driving in circles

if it gives us time

to add people to the car?





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed (*she/her*) is the new Associate Pastor for Young Adults and Membership at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in Social Work, and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Columbia Theological Seminary. Sarah loves to combine her love of all things creative with her passion for God. She believes that the Church has a

responsibility to open every door to God, so that those of us who are visual, kinesthetic, or relational learners all have equal opportunity to engage God to the fullest of our abilities. Sarah feels called to live her life welcoming people into the church by using her energy and passion for beautifully scripted words, raw and relevant liturgy, and hands-on worship experiences to engage our longing for God and the need for justice in this messy world. Writing is her most beloved spiritual practice. You can find her daily poems on Instagram and Facebook: @writingthegood | writingthegood.com

