

In these three readings,

there is an unusual number of words and phrases
dealing with geographical placement -and displacement-
and "who's here" and "who's there"
and how we end up "there" instead of "here."

Consider just these,

from Jeremiah:

mislead scatter drive away
gather up bring back go missing

from Ephesians:

far off one in place of two
come near come away

from Mark:

come away deserted place
going /coming leaving /arriving

The wanderings, the meanderings, the travels of the people of God...

Who says the scriptures are ancient and don't speak to today's life?

All of these words and phrases can be understood as descriptive
of today's Catholic church:

- many Catholics believe they were "mislead"
by church policies and decisions and decision makers;
- some find themselves "scattered," even "driven away,"
seeking other faith communities to work and worship in;
- in our own parish, a number of people have gone "missing"
since the abuse crisis and the reconfiguration of parishes,
and some have found new churches, Catholic or other,
while others are in a "deserted place"
not yet having found a new home for their faith;

*(The combined registration rolls of St. Bernard and Our Lady parishes
totaled some 1,600 households;*

while only some 1,200 households have registered at Holy Family.

What has become of those 400 households?)

- and many who are still here, even at this Mass,
feel "far off" from the parish or place or pastor or practices
that were for so long so important to them.

That accounts for about half the words I noted
at the beginning of my homily.

The other half of the list is the most important:

gather up bring back come near
one in place of two arrive...

These are the words of our hope, our future.

If we take any comfort in knowing that our distress and displacement
are as ancient as Israel in the captivity of their exile
then we should also take hope in knowing that it is nothing less than
the plan and promise of God
to gather what has been scattered,
to unite what has been divided,
to bring home who have wandered far off.

The wanderings, the meanderings, the travels of the people of God...

As a pastor, as one of the shepherds held accountable by Jeremiah,
I know that the Lord more often than not accomplishes his work
through the day-to-day work of our hands, yours and mine.

Just three months from this weekend
we will mark the second anniversary of the founding
of Holy Family Parish.
I can think of no better way to celebrate that anniversary
than working to welcome back those who are away.

The work of gathering back those who have been scattered
is as much yours as it is mine,
and it is as much mine as it is yours.
In many instances,
you know better than I who is missing
and you have greater and more frequent access to them than I.

I hope to work with the Parish Pastoral Council
to make of the second anniversary of Holy Family Parish
a time to "gather up" and "bring home"
those who have been misled, scattered and gone missing.

We will not be able in just a few months
to reconcile everything that has been divided,
but my hope and prayer is that we can welcome back to this table
many of those whose places have been empty.

In the end, it is neither the place nor the policies,
neither the prelates nor the pastor that matter the most.
At the heart of who we are is the sacrament of this table:
HERE is the place the Lord invites us to come away to,
the table where the Good Shepherd of us all
gathers us in his strong and loving arms
and makes of us his beloved people..

The wanderings, the meanderings, the travels of the people of God...
all lead to this table and nourishment it offers.

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*