

“HOW TO DO A HOMECOMING”

(Almont, MI Homecoming Weekend)

August 16, 2026

I want to begin by simply saying “GOOD MORNING” to you our brothers and sisters in Christ here at Almont First Congregational Church. Some of you remember Jill and me when we were way younger and our hair was a darker color than it is now. But I have to tell you that you have no idea how good it feels to stand here before you again on a Sunday morning during worship. And having said that, I do want to thank Pastor Bill for giving me the opportunity to share with you today. Jill and I well remember when we first arrived in Almont, having made an initial six-year commitment to the church, and low and behold, by God’s great grace, we ended up being here some 26 years. Our favorite oldest daughter, Allison, was 14 months old when we arrived on the scene and our favorite youngest daughter, Lisa, made her appearance just under ^{two}~~three~~ years later. This is their home, where they grew up, where they had all sorts of friends, where they were involved in all sorts of activities and where they graduated from high school and then headed off to college. And Almont is also the place where for over twenty years Jill worked in the school system (in the high school and junior high office) along with being HUGELY involved in the church’s ministry along side me.

And as I stand here, I can tell you that it has been some twenty years since Jill and I left Almont and headed east to the Hershey, Pennsylvania area where I

served as an associate pastor at a church for some ten – eleven years and where we lived for 15 years before we moved back to Michigan, and more specifically to Kalamazoo.

about 6 weeks
It has been ~~a month~~ or so since Blake Howie contacted me to see if I was available and if I would like to/be able to return to Almont to speak in worship this weekend. And in the course of our conversations, he asked me if I could speak in some way about “HOMECOMING,” and I agreed to work on that. I believe the Lord gave me some thoughts about this while Jill and I were driving back to Michigan from our daughter’s home in Indiana. So what I want to do this morning is to simply share some REMINDERS that hopefully will be helpful for all of us.

SO I WANT TO BEGIN BY NOTING THAT HOMECOMINGS ARE ABOUT REMEMBERING.

Needless to say, this is pretty obvious isn’t it. Think about it: Where would we be if we couldn’t remember? Or how about this: What if we chose NOT to remember? Memories have such power to shape us, to influence us as we move forward in our lives, to impact our values, choices and decisions in life.

And when we come together for an event such as a HOMECOMING weekend, it definitely involves memories. Think about the people who influenced you in your earlier life, the people who poured into your life or who were simply an

encouraging example. Remember the teachers and coaches who impacted you through your contacts with them. And let's not forget the experiences we have had that have shaped us, motivated us and even given us a direction in life. It's amazing to not only think about all of that but to also to thank the Lord for His presence in and through all of those people and experiences and how He has used them in our lives.

There were/are people here who profoundly and positively impacted Allison's and Lisa's lives – people who were examples, encouragers, who just simply loved on them and who instructed them in the faith. And Jill and I have so many memories of Almont and the church and the people here that, at least for myself, I don't even know where to begin in sharing those memories and even what memories to share.

And as I worked on getting ready for this morning, I was reminded how absolutely important “**REMEMBERING**” is to our faith. In Deuteronomy, the word “REMEMBER” is huge. In chapter 8, God challenges the people of Israel to REMEMBER all the way that He has led them and all the ways that He has provided for them. In fact, in this same chapter He commands them, “do not forget, do not forget, do not forget” (vs. 11, 14 and v. 19). In this regard, years ago I started reading all the way through the Bible every year because I wanted to be exposed to ALL of God's Word. And it's amazing how often we're commanded to remember who OUR GOD is – that He is the Most High God whose name is above every name in heaven or on earth. I'm amazed at how often Scripture reminds us that our God is the Creator God who is the Lord over all creation. And it's also amazing how often the Lord reminds us that our

the old school
macdonalds
the new school
when I-69
to Port
Huron was
completed

- yesterday our drive around
Almont, for remembering

God called the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and how He led them through the Red Sea and through the wilderness and provided for their every need along the way. And these same truths literally fill the pages of the Book of Psalms. And He's the same Lord for us today, present and ready to address our every need, concern, worry, doubt and fear.

The challenge remains the same for us today: DON'T FORGET! In Deut. 8:10ff., we read as follows:

10 When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 "But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. 12 For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, 13 and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! 14 Do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God.

It raises the question of, Am I forgetting the Lord in my life? Am I forgetting His good blessings and benefits to me? Am I forgetting to be thankful to Him for all His benefits? With the Lord, it's always a good time to remember.

- End each day by being thankful - write down
3 or 4 items from that for which you are
thankful

SECONDLY, HOMECOMING IS ABOUT CONNECTING!

Homecomings are great times to connect with people from our past who have touched our lives in some very special ways. My understanding is that these HOMECOMINGS happen once every five years, and I would guess that they are largely for the purpose of connecting with significant people in our past, in our lives. All through my life I have often reflected back on at least five people who HUGELY impacted my life in terms of my becoming a follower of Jesus and in terms of encouraging me to follow the Lord's leading toward/into ministry. Those five people (Emma Kafferlin, Betty Porter, Joe Bodie, Dale and Opal Linebaugh) literally left indelible marks on my soul enabling me to recognize and follow the Lord's call on my life.

My wife, Jill, grew up in Tokyo and graduated from high school there. She has great memories of her classmates and teachers and those folk fairly frequently have reunions to reconnect with each other and to keep in contact with one another.

But stop and think about it: Who are the people who had such an encouraging impact on you, whether when you were very young, or maybe a teacher or coach or a choir director or a youth leader or maybe your parents or a brother/sister or whomever? Connecting with them could significantly bless them, just the idea that you thought of them and cared about them.

In coming back to Almont this weekend, you can be sure that Jill and Allison and I have been talking about people that we knew when we lived here for so many years. And, not knowing who we were going to be able to see, we have looked forward to getting here and reconnect with you. So thank you for having us and welcoming us back.

And let me just interject here that Lisa, our youngest daughter, would love to be here with us this weekend but she has two little rascals, as I call them, running around her house (our 4-year old granddaughter and our 1-year old grandson) and her husband Mark works for Eli Lilly and is significantly involved in pharmaceutical research and development and works long hours. Otherwise, she would have been with us. Rest assured that sometime she totally wants to bring Mark to Almont so he can see where she grew up.

Loneliness in America is a major public health crisis affecting up to half of all adults, driven by factors like excessive screen time, busy work schedules, and a lack of family time, to name just a few reasons. This widespread isolation creates serious health risks health officials tell us, comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and impacts mental and physical well-being.

Tom Holladay in his book, "The Relationship Principles of Jesus," has written that: "From beginning to end, nothing is more important than relationships. In the beginning, God created you for relationships. He made you to relate to Him and to others. Miss out on relationships, and you're missing the core reason for which God put you on this planet. And in the end, nothing is more important, because nothing will last longer than relationships."

In his book, *"What On Earth Am I Here For?"* Rick Warren wrote: "When we place our faith in Christ, God becomes our Father, we become his children, other believers become our brothers and sisters, and the church becomes our spiritual family. The family of God includes all believers in the past, present and the future."

He continues by saying, "Every human being was created by God, but not everyone is a child of God. The only way to get into God's family is by being born again into it. You become part of the human family by your first birth, but you become a member of God's family by your second birth." The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:5 --- *"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ."* The invitation to be part of God's family is universal, but there is one condition: Personal faith in Jesus as our Savior.

Let's determine to wipe out any loneliness that might exist within our church here, but let's not stop here. Let's then determine to take His love outside these walls to totally impact this community for Jesus' sake.

Voyage: Go out + live the love

But there is one final reminder about the impact of HOMECOMINGS that I want to mention to you. HOMECOMINGS are about PREPARING!

For a number of years now I have had the privilege of working in a national organization called Market Place Chaplains. Just as the name suggests, Marketplace is all about placing chaplains in secular businesses for the sake

of employee care. I have had the privilege of serving in several different companies/settings both in Pennsylvania and here in Michigan. What a great opportunity to get to know to get to know lots of people.

In one of my most recent assignments, I was serving in a grey iron foundry in Three Rivers, MI. Roughly 180 employees worked there, mostly men, although there were a few gals. It's a place that every time you go there you hear all the language that you never wanted to use. But I got to know a bunch of the men there. And one of them named Doug had worked in the Maintenance Dept. for some 42 years. I developed a fun relationship with him and not too long ago he was getting ready to cash in his chips, so to speak, and retire. So I prayed for an opportunity to talk to Doug and one day the Lord provided me with that opportunity. I said to him, "Doug, you've been here for 42 years and all that time you have been preparing for retirement so to speak, the point at which you find yourself right now. But just a reminder before you're gone and I don't have the opportunity to see you again. You've gotten ready for retirement, but don't forget to get ready for eternity. And the only way to do that is through Jesus Christ."

There's a final HOMECOMING that's going to take place and it will end all homecomings, when Jesus will one day return like a thief in the night, at a time when we least expect His return. Like Doug, now's the time to think not only about retirement, but especially about personally getting ready for His return by fully opening our hearts and lives to Him. The writer of Hebrews wrote:

"Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will

*appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him” (Heb. 9:28). It was the Apostle Paul who wrote to the Corinthian believers in his first letter to them and said: “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you **EAGERLY WAIT** for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed” (1Cor. 1:7).*

So clearly, we’re not done with HOMECOMINGS yet. And the question remains to each and every one of us: Are you just getting ready for retirement, or have you taken the time and effort to get ready for eternity as well?

Rick Warren has written: “Your spiritual family is even more important than your physical, earthly family, because your spiritual family will last forever. Our families on earth are wonderful gifts from God, but they are temporary . . . On the other hand, our spiritual family --- our relationships with other Christ followers --- will continue through eternity.”

