While today’s text from 2nd Corinthians really does lend itself to one of my world-famous sermons on Gnosticism, my therapist has been helping me work through such temptations and so in an effort to show my progress I am not going to scratch this particular itch. But I am still going to preach on 2nd Corinthians. Not because I have anything against the noble cedars of the Old Testament lesson or the mustard seeds of the Gospel, its just that I couldn’t think of anything to say about them. So, because of my lack of imagination we are going to take a minute and reflect on this little line from 2nd Corinthians which reads, “we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.” And what I am going to say about this really comes down to defining what being at home in the body means. I don’t know if this clears things up but as I understand it, being at home in the body means that we are more comfortable with and give greater priority to the things that are not of God.

Let me tell a little story and see if I can sort of explain what I mean and I promise it has a point. In the summer before Meredith went into fourth grade, she took a little drama class at her school. She had taken the same class the year before and enjoyed it, so we felt like we had a pretty good understanding of what it was going to be like. The class would choose a theme, then the kids would create some short skits around this theme and at the end of the week they would perform those skits for the parents. I can’t remember what the theme was on the previous year but this particular year the theme was food. Fairly basic and it did not seem to offer a whole lot of ways for things to go wrong. So, on the last day of class with expectations of hearing the kids sing about hankering for a hunk of cheese, we showed up to watch the skits. From the get go it was apparent that something had gone very wrong because, if you will excuse the bad joke, food did not appear on the menu. It turned out that one of the girls in the class had recently seen the movie *The Hunger Games* and responded to it the way the monkeys did to the monolith at the beginning of *2001 A Space Odyssey.* It was central to her understanding of the cosmos. And to the teachers shame they did not corral this obsession but rather indulged her and let her take over the whole class under the veneer that being hungry has a food component to it. So, for thirty minutes we were forced to watch skits that all seemed to involve this *Hunger Games* obsessed girl pretending to be Katniss effortlessly shooting people with arrows. She was at home with *The Hunger Games* and as a result she forced everything else to be subservient to her particular obsession.

Similarly, when we are at home in the body everything gets filtered through whatever our particular wants and desires are, including God. The rest of the universe is asked to play best supporting actor to our show. And how this looks in practicality is like the scant connection between *The Hunger Games* and skits about food we decide that reality must be the handmaiden of our wants and desires. And this tendency is the reason why the Church teaches us the opposite and that is that God must be our first love. This is also why Jesus tells us that we cannot serve two masters and why Paul tells us today that being at home in our body means that we will be distanced from God. And so, what does it look like when God is our first love? What does it look like when we listen to Paul today and are at home in the Lord?

I think if I had to offer one characteristic it would be about scope. When we love God first, we are imbued with a large and grace filled love. As contrasted with a human-centric type of love. Human love is a small and exclusive kind of love, it is a love that comes with an enemies list. And so being at home in the body is being at home with separation and judgement. It is telling someone that because they do not think exactly the same as us and hold our same views that they are beyond the pale. The American Enterprise Institute recently published a survey on friendship and one of the depressing findings was that 28% of people who identified themselves as politically liberal and 10% who identified as politically conservative said that they had ended a friendship over political differences. Put another way because of someone’s views on taxation or healthcare distribution they were decreed unworthy of friendship. Sometimes the lessons we need to learn in life are as simple as saying don’t do that. Don’t find your own opinions so sacrosanct that they alienate you from humanity and God’s creation. We cannot let our own opinions alienate us from being at home in the Lord. If God so loves the world then we must love the world, not just the parts we like or the people who agree with our awesome opinions.

Now if this was not hard enough there is another part that may be even harder. And that has to do with loving people while still acknowledging the full reality of who they are and who we are. Loving someone as God loves them does not mean that we are not to care about anyone’s opinions or behaviors but rather that we do not alienate them for this. The closest thing we have in our lives to the kind of love that God calls us to is probably the love we have for our children. With our children we love unconditionally but also want the best for them so we try to change their behaviors. If our 16-year-old came to us and asked for the keys to the car and a bottle of whiskey we would not give it to them even though it is what they want. Because we love them, we do not agree with everything whim and desire. Similarly, God disapproves of lots of our behavior because he wants what is best for us. So being at home in the Lord does not mean that we become libertines rejecting all moral standards but rather that we work together with those we love to grow closer to God’s standards admitting that we might also be the ones who need to change.

When I was young and naïve, I used to think how wonderful the world would be if I was its Tsar. That is if I was in charge of everything, I could fix all the problems in the world. As I grew older and discovered that I wasn’t even capable of fixing my own car I realized that it might not be such a good idea for me to run the world. I simply lacked the knowledge and ability. And the wonderful thing is that being at home in the Lord means we don’t have to be Tsar of the world. We are liberated and freed and capable of admitting that we might not know everything and that judging the world based on something as fickle and frail as ourselves is really a bad idea. That is why we must change our home and be with the Lord.

Being at home in the body is fairly easy because it is sort of our default setting. The temptation the serpent offered to Eve was the knowledge of good and evil and what was actually delivered was the belief that we could define good and evil; that everything is judged based on our own personal criteria. But as Paul warns us this morning this will inherently make us not at home with God. The mission of the church is really about change it is about changing individuals from being self-focused to being focused on God. And it is only when we are moving in that direction, towards God’s love and perfection that we may be his, this day and forevermore.