CONNECTIONS

Home. Homesteads. Home stays. Retirement homes. Home town.  Mid pleasures and palaces, though we may roam, be it ever so humble, there's no place like home. Take me home, country roads. The green, green grass of home. The homeless. Home coming. Home fires. Home sickness. Home work. Writing home. Working at home. A home truth. Home maker. Home keeper. Homing pigeons. Home and away.

There is no end to the words and images that cluster round the idea of home. And I guess that the Angles and Saxons from whose language our word *home* comes (*ham*) had a similar range of feelings about their own homes, as have every human tribe and nation that have ever built a permanent shelter for themselves.

Recently, I’ve been reading a beautifully illustrated collection of modern fables, called *The Boy, the Fox and the Horse*, by Charlie Mackesy (Penguin, 2010), and came across this short story, called simply, ‘The Boy, the Mole and the Horse’. Try it:

'Sometimes l feel lost,' said the Boy.

'Me too,' said the Mole.

'But we both love you, and love brings you home.'

'l think everyone is just trying to get home,' added the Mole.

'What's home?' asked the Boy.

'Home isn't always a place,' replied the Mole.

'Then we've such a long way to go,' sighed the Boy.

'Yes, but look how far we've come,' said the Horse.

Covid-19 has given a new dimension to our thinking about home. It means something special—dare I say spiritual— to New Zealanders desperately trying to get home from whatever distant place in the world they find themselves in the middle of a world-wide and frequently deadly pandemic. Home may mean a variety of things to a young family in lock-down at home, or to older people told to stay at home as a place of safety from infection and worse. Home as prison, or a refuge or just another workplace. And if domestic violence is involved, sometimes home as a private hell.

Yet, for the homeless, home is a dream, an escape from underground railway platforms or sleeping places on a few rags under bridges or the hard rails of a park seat. Home is the unreachable paradise for those who don’t have one. They are the lost souls with whom Jesus himself identified: ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.’

The same man of ultimate compassion offered profound words of reassurance and hope, words which have rung down through the centuries of poverty and deprivation, of war and disease, of oppression and sheer hopelessness.

‘In my Father’s house there are many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am.’

Our present condition, whether we are confined to our homes or not, whether we feel imprisoned or protected and sheltered in them, has brought the idea of home into new focus for all of us.

Let us quietly reflect on what our homes mean to us, and be concerned for all those who cannot find their way to any home they can claim as their own.

**Colin Gibson**