

This is Somewhere

Luke 2: 11

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**Christmas Eve AD 2018
Gerrit Scott Dawson**

There's a band I like from Mobile called the Mulligan Brothers.



Their style is called Americana: it's a bit of country, a bit of folk, a bit of rock and a whole lot of evocative lyrics and poignant tunes. They've got one song called "So Are You" that I've been thinking about a lot. It's a story about a young woman named Katie who follows her dreams to leave her small town and try out life in the big city. She reasons that if she stayed home, "I would always be just Katie there." And she wants to be more than just Katie. So she arrives in the city with the confidence that comes from having had a home, and a place, and support all her life. This rootedness is a treasure Katie takes for granted. But, too soon, Katie discovers that the city wants to suck away that life from her. It gives back no life.

As the song moves on, Katie realizes that once she was from *somewhere* and she was *somebody* to those people who loved her all her life. In her yearning to grow up and test her wings, though, Katie thought such support was but a small thing, and that she could find more life somewhere else. She discovered, sadly, that the shiny city just treats her as a commodity. All her joy of spirit and zeal for life became something for hungry, empty people to consume. She's only someone to be used and then discarded. She's only a replaceable part in an indifferent machine. Katie is heartsick to learn that this bright shiny city is actually no place and in it she is no one. Mid-song, Katie is caught between innocence and experience, innocence to which she can't return and emptiness of cruel experience she can't escape.

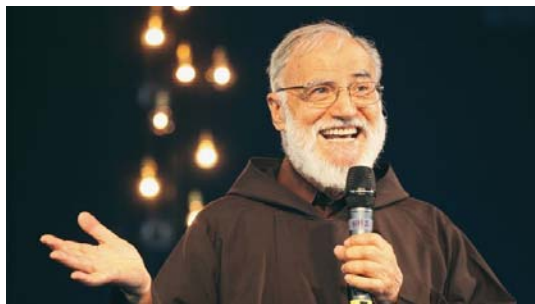
The bridge in the song offers Katie the only way of escape:

You've got to make yourself at home and
Make your home at yourself.
Every place you've ever dreamed of
Is full of people who are dreaming of someplace else.

So make sure you can say
To anyone that comes your way
This is somewhere and I'm somebody. And so are you.¹

The song captures beautifully the illusory dream in us that real life, true home, is somewhere besides where we are. That real life is something somebody else is experiencing. If only we could go *there*. If only we could have *their* life. But the song reveals the truth, "Every place you've ever dreamed of is full of people dreaming of being someplace else." The people crammed in the city are bored with the lights and the skyscrapers. They want to go to the islands. But the people who live on a Caribbean beach want to take a vacation to the Alps. But the people who live in the Alps are bored with the mountains. They want to go to the big city. And so it goes. If only I could go . . . If I only I could be But all those people in all those places we dream are all dreaming of someplace else. Home is not out there. The Mulligan Brothers song tells us "You've got to make *yourself* at home and make your home *at* yourself." You've got to learn to say, "This," right here, "is somewhere. And right now, "I'm somebody. And so are you."

They've got the answer to our restlessness. Real life is not out there. It's here. It's not a change in circumstances that we need. It's a change in heart. Now I love this song. It tells the truth. But it's only 4 minutes long. And it doesn't tell us *how* to get to that answer. They don't give us the way to go from searching out there for life and home to discovering it in this place at this moment. Tonight, right here, that's what we're after.



I've never actually met the man I consider to be my pastor. I've only read his writings and heard some of his talks on YouTube. But I feel like Father Raniero Cantalamessa gets my soul. This Italian monk who looks like an Irish elf speaks to my heart's concerns. I feel like if I could talk to him, I would entrust him with my deepest feelings. Once in a Christmas sermon, Father Raniero discussed all the ways that Christ saves us. In one section, he explained how Christ saves us from *space*. Now isn't that an odd thing to say? Jesus saves us from space.



Father Raniero notes the revolution that has occurred in our understanding of the universe. Earth is not the center of the cosmos. It's not even the center of our solar system. And the lights in the sky are not just lamps in a high ceiling. Some are stars millions of light years away. And some of them are actually galaxies containing millions more stars. We are but a speck. We are nowhere in the cosmos. We are no one to the enormous, indifferent universe. The very size of space creates a crisis in meaning for us.

But then Father Raniero notes that there's an even more daunting experience of space around us. It's the space created by proliferation of videos and social media. Suddenly we are aware of more and more people around us. And we are shown images of people who are doing things we are *not* doing. They look more glamorous than we look. They look happier than we feel. They apparently experience more passion, more adventure and more fulfillment than we do. Some of them have followers. Thousands want to know everything they say and do and eat and feel. And we look up from our distracted, bored, stressed out lives and wonder. Is that what makes for life? Do I need to be someone that others follow in order to be complete? Do I require people to react to my posts to have significance? Or do I need to be more of a follower? Will I get some of the life of beautiful, interesting people if I follow them avidly? Should I love, love, love more pics and posts? The constant awareness of people in the space of social media drives us either to envy or depression. It's almost old news to cite all the studies that document that the more you look at Facebook, or Instagram, the worse you feel about your life. But we still do it. We follow. We stalk. And we still seek platforms. We still seek to be looked at and admired even though we read report after report of the relentless pressure that bloggers feel to feed their followers. And the devastation of becoming old content. Social media promises to bring us closer. But it's creating more space around us, more separation. The images we consume feed the feeling that life is somewhere else. That being someone who matters is *being* someone else. We get lost in this space of all these images pushed at us.

But Father Raniero tells us that Jesus saves us from the emptiness of that space. Jesus saves us from feeling that we are nobody from nowhere. How? How? The angel said to the shepherds, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior, which is Christ the Lord." The Lord has come to us. He has come down to the *nowhere* town of our *nobody* lives and said, "I will dwell there. And wherever I

am, life is. *Wherever I am, is the center of the universe.* I am the Creator God. I am the origin and I am the goal. Where I go is the heart of reality. I am *Somebody*. I am. And I have come to visit you.” Suddenly our speck of a planet in a tiny solar system on the edge of a mediocre galaxy in the vastness of the cosmos is the very center of attention to the Creator of all. He confers dignity and worth upon our planet by visiting. He confers significance upon the human race by taking up what we are. God comes to us as a man and invests every human being with significance. And he comes to a particular place, a nowhere place to quite ordinary people. So a feeding trough in a stable outside the tiny village of Bethlehem becomes a royal throne. And he comes in a way that the most ordinary of people can go to find him. The motley crew of shepherds comes to be his first followers, so if they can find him anyone can. He entered our space, once upon a particular time.

That first Christmas is not lost in the past. He comes to us still. Jesus does what no celebrity we follow can ever do: he comes to our hearts. He descends into our lives right where we are. He invests our individual lives with his presence. He comes to the feeding trough of your heart and declares, “I will live there, and satisfy you, if you will have me. I am *Somebody* and this is *Somewhere*. *Wherever I am is the center of life, and if you are in me, you are there.*”

So Father Raniero tells us,

Faith in Christ frees us . . . to be happy and fulfilled right where we are...God, the infinite, has come and comes toward you continually, right where you are. So Christ’s coming . . . makes every place the best place. With Christ in our hearts we feel that we are at the center of the world even if we are in the most remote village on earth.

That explains why so many believers, men and women, can live unknown to all, can do the humblest work in the world . . . and yet feel themselves to be the happiest and most fulfilled people on earth.²

The Mulligans are right: what you seek is not out there. It’s right here. You’ve got to make home be something you carry inside you. But we can’t do that on our own. We can only do that when we carry in us the God who made earth his home. We can only make home *at* ourselves when we receive the God who makes his home *in* our hearts. Life isn’t somewhere else. This, this church, tonight, is *Somewhere*. Alone, in myself, I am nobody. But in Christ, this night, right now, each of us can say, “Christ is in me and I am in Christ. He is *Somebody* and I am

Somebody in him.” Then, freed from both envy and despair, we can add joyfully to each we meet, “And so are you.”

One Christmas Eve, a very tiny, very ancient woman made her slow, bent way to the communion table. She had lived for years in barest poverty. On her way back to her pew, she was overheard to be saying over and over, “Now I have everything; now I have everything.” Indeed. In just a moment, you will be invited to come forward to receive everything. To come home. To make home at yourself by coming home to Christ. For the first time. Or the first time in a long time. In a new way or a deeper way. God has visited us and we find home in him. Come home to Christ!

¹ The Mulligan Brothers, “So Are You,” *Via Portland*, 2016.

² Raniero Cantalamessa, *Remember Jesus Christ: Responding to the Challenges of Faith in Our Time*, trans. Marsha Daigle-Williamson (Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2007), pp. 66-9.