



An Open Letter to the Spiritually Homeless:

My dear brothers and sisters,

I write to you as both violator and victim. As one who has led the church and has been hurt by it. As someone who is part of the problem and who also wants to be part of the solution.

And I write out of a profound love, for Jesus and his people. I write to and about my tribe, the evangelical Christian church in America. I write as a Christian and as a pastor and as a failure and as a sinner.

To you, the spiritually homeless, I send greetings.

Spiritual homelessness isn't the feeling of being in-between churches; or of having big questions that need answered; or being disappointed that the church isn't perfect. That part's of the picture, but this homelessness is far more profound than that.

By the spiritually homeless I don't mean the biblical idea that we are foreigners and exiles in this world. That, too, is part of the picture, but it is, again, bigger than that.

And it's not just simply renouncing Jesus, Christianity, and the church, though it may come to that for some of us.

No, the spiritually homeless are those of us raised in the confines of the American evangelicalism, but now find ourselves feeling disillusioned and betrayed

by the sub-culture that nurtured us. We are unsettled and uncertain about what was handed down to us as the gospel truth. We are profoundly sad, and angry and lonely. We just don't fit in, no matter what church we attend.

And yet....yet we still are fascinated by the beauty of Jesus the Nazarene. We are pulled between the comfort of certainty and the risk of mystery; between cynicism and faith; between hope and despair.

Just as importantly, we still long for a tribe, a community, a band of brothers and sisters; a place to call home.

As we survey the Christian landscape, we see no place for us - in the dueling fundamentalisms of conservative and progressive Christianity; in the pragmatic, consumeristic, celebrity-driven mega-church, or in the God-wants-you-to-believe-in-yourself-and-follow-your-dreams drivel of the self-help crowd, we see no place for us.

To those, the spiritual diaspora and the exiles of American Evangelicalism, greetings.

I write to remind you that you are not alone, every week I hear from dozens of people like us, feeling stranded and looking for a way forward.

It's not just the rise of the "nones" - people with no religious affiliation - that should make news.

It's the flood of spiritual refugees who still give a damn about this whole thing but cannot stand the way our faith has been hijacked --that is also newsworthy.

There is a rising chorus of voices that are shouting to the world that Franklin Graham, Robert Jeffress, John MacArthur do not speak for us. They are not our leaders and they certainly are not our role models.

We seek to dissolve the unholy alliance of the Christian faith to partisan politics, unjust policy, and compassionless leadership.

We stand opposed to any vision of Christianity that does not have the message and the upside down way of Jesus at its center.

We resist any attempt to tone us down, or to tell us to stay in our lane - to keep our Jesus following to ourselves and just play along as self-satisfied, America-first consuming units.

I also write to condemn myself and all those in church leadership who have hurt us.

Woe to those who have set us up to struggle by not welcoming our questions and embracing our curiosity.

Woe to those who cover up the abuses and failures of the church in the name of protecting its reputation;

Woe to those who say all are welcome but secretly adhere to a hierarchy of sin;

Woe to those who exclude, and marginalize others, from the place of their own self-righteousness.

Woe to those who have not given permission to others to be in process, to doubt, and to struggle.

Woe to those who failed to listen to the victims, who have protected the people in power, and who have worshiped money and success rather than the living and holy God.

And woe to those who have attached Jesus' name, to actions and attitudes, that are truly, and clearly, anti-Christ.

My dear brothers and sisters, I write to beg you not give up hope. To not rush toward resolution just yet.

For there is good work to be done in the place of in-between. Our God is a homeless God, perfect for a homeless people.

In Genesis 28, Jacob, a man on the run from his older brother, stops for the night at a "certain place." This "certain place" had nothing special attached to it; it had no name, no strategic location, no well for water, no shrine or altar for worship.

But its' in this place, as Jacob sleeps, that God appears to him in a dream promising to bless him and be with him. Upon waking, Jacob thinks to himself, "surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is no other than the house of God; the gate of heaven."

Jacob was shocked his God was found in that unremarkable place. The other gods of the ANE were localized to geographic areas and limited to altars and temples; but Jacob's God, though, was an "on the road" kind of God. He wasn't limited to just special places or special times.

For those of us who are wandering today, this is good news. For like Jacob, we follow a God who walks with us on the road, not waiting for special times or places, but perfectly comfortable in the obscure and ordinary and in the "in-between." There is work God wants to do on the journey, if we'll stop long enough to pay attention.

Lastly, I write with profound anticipation. I believe that God is behind much of our current deconstruction; if Jesus was willing to deconstruct the temple of his day, are we to be surprised when he exposes the corruption of the church?

He himself said, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

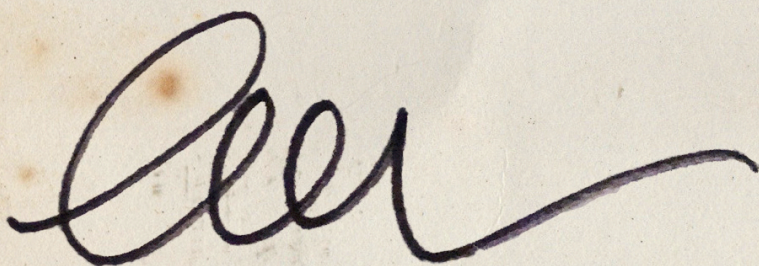
From the wreckage and corruption of the leadership of Judaism in his day, Jesus formed a community of people willing to leave the known religious structures traditions, and to follow him into something new.

They too were spiritually homeless, with traditional Pharisaic Judaism behind, and the not-yet-developed-idea of "church" ahead.

They were called to wait, and to trust, just as we are. And they became the vanguard of a new way of being God's people in the world, just as we are invited to be.

Whether the wandering tribes of Israelites in the desert or the bewildered disciples travelling through the Galilean countryside, God has always used those willing to be spiritually homeless to renew his blessing to the world.

May grace and peace be yours in Christ Jesus.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mike Erre". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mike Erre