

Sermon May 10

The Holy Gospel according to John:

14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

14:2 In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

14:4 And you know the way to the place where I am going."

14:5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

14:7 If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

14:8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

14:9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

14:10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

14:11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

14:12 Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

14:13 I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14:14 If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Word of God. Word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

Dear siblings in Christ,

As you've witnessed so far in this worship service, it's quite possible that I'm beginning to go a little stir crazy in my house as we approach 60 days of isolating! This work-from-home life presents challenges. It's hard to keep the two vocations – parenting and work – separate from each other. And, even on the days when I'm not working, it's hard to stay cooped up in my home. On my block.

And yet, this Spring more than any other before, I have a deep awareness and knowledge of the flowering trees in my neighborhood...something I never paid much attention to. Lydia and I check on them almost every day. We've watch the buds burst open into beautiful flowers...bushes and trees filling the air with lovely colors and fragrances.

My bedroom doubles as an office. My small backyard doubles as an imaginary field where monsters roam. My bathtub doubles as a baptismal font. My television and laptop now doubles as a sanctuary, where I gather to worship with my dear friends and community.

But I'm still getting stir crazy. Here. In this house. In these rooms. With this confinement.

But I'm also learning that where I find joy these days is not in the particulars of a physical *space*, but is instead in the deepening relationship I have to it. It's in becoming more deeply rooted to the land and the place where I've always been planted. It's in finding new imaginative ways to transform these spaces - for example, a folding table becomes a house!

“In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places,” Jesus promises, “and I am going there to prepare a place for you.

It's not about a place, it's a relationship. It says something about us – about our culture – that when we hear about this dwelling place with God we immediately begin to imagine (sometimes in jest, sometimes seriously) what this amazing mansion in heaven will be like! Will the sidewalks be made of gold? Will I get my own swimming pool? Could that swimming pool, from time to time, be filled instead with chocolate pudding? Will it be a place where I get everything I want, where I'm comfortable and taken care of, where all of my deepest questions will be answered?

The mansion in heaven – the dwelling place promised by Jesus – has, over time, become a capsule where we can place all of our personal wishes and fantasies. But these wishes we have, over the course of time, have become about individual desires and wants. They fulfill an idea of life that is about autonomy, independence, getting what I think I deserve, finding joy in my *stuff*, *my comfort*, *my security*.

I suspect I don't need to spend a whole lot of time talking about how this way of constructing what ultimately matters has been revealed to us in this time of pandemic for the illusion it always was. Meaning, finally, comes through relationship...relationship *to* the dwelling places of our lives, our relationship to the land, our relationships with the people fill these spaces with.

Jesus knows this. He doesn't promise a mansion. But he does, in great love, promise himself. "I will come again and take you to myself," he continues, "so that where I am, you may be also. And you know the place where I am going."

Thankfully, Thomas is there. Later, he will come to be known as "Doubting Thomas." But here, he is so urgently invested in maintaining this relationship that he asks the obvious question on everyone's mind: "Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?"

We know what comes next. It's the words that have become famous as some sort of exclusive claim on God. But, at their heart, they're nothing more than the reflection of a deep and true relationship. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. Nobody comes to the Father except through me."

I once heard a preacher, Alan Storey, compare these words to what lovers say to each other all the time: "I've only got eyes for you." "You are the only one for me, and I am the only one for you." "We were made to be together..."

Jesus is desperate to be with us. God is longing for us to know God's presence. The dwelling place prepared for us is not for primarily *our* comfort, it is for God's. It is to restore the loving, interrelated harmony and unity of all things, once and for all. It is to bring about the beloved community that God lovingly intends for all.

And so, in this time of self-isolation, we are seeing as clearly as we ever have, about how much we also long for this final harmony and unity. How much we, in fact, were never defined as independent actors – we've always needed one another. We always have been social creatures. We *need* the love, the care, the tenderness of others in the same way that we need air, water, and daily bread.

The most heart-wrenching conversations I have had in this time of isolation is with partners who must now stay away from their ailing loved ones being kept in a nursing home or hospital or care center. It's conversations with people who are grieving the death of a loved one, but who can't receive the comforting touch and care of their community.

It's awful. There are no words we can say that can erase this pain, that can heal these wounds. But, thankfully, we don't need the words. Because they belong to Jesus:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places...I am going there to prepare a place for you, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

My friends, we will be together again. We will be reunited with one another, with our loved ones, with beloved and caring community. I hope and pray it will be on this side of the grave, in the company of the living where we can touch, care for one another, and celebrate our reunion of people who have always needed one another.

But these relationships go on, through Christ. And, trusting in the promises of Christ, we know that we will be reunited one day in the company of all the saints, in the full presence of God, in a dwelling place free from fear, pandemic, and isolation. It is a dwelling place of love, of peace, of eternal rest. And it is ours. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Even though our gospel reading included a lot of Father/Son language, I want to take a moment to say “Happy Mother’s Day!” Many moms all around the world – including you moms watching from home right now – are carrying an extra household burden to an already heavy load in navigating these days of isolation. Thank you, Moms, for teaching unconditional love, and *patience*.
- Announcement about extension of our no in-person worship – June 15th...we will send another announcement with any updates by June 1st.
- Beginning this Wednesday, May 13th, we will begin an evening prayer service, led LIVE over Zoom video conferencing, beginning this Wednesday, May 13th, at 6:30 PM
- Next Sunday is Holy Communion Sunday
- Stay connected with us through our facebook page, twitter, Instagram. All announcements and news and worship links are also being made available at our website – www.lifeatctk.org
- At this time we’ll take time to collect an online offering, and receive an offering of music.