

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Year A  
May 10, 2020  
John 14:1-14

Countless families choose Jesus' words at the beginning of John 14 to be spoken at the burial of a loved one. Jesus' words are wonderfully comforting, and at the same time deeply troubling to some, especially for non-Christians who often form a large part of the gathering at a memorial service.

Understanding the context of this scripture is especially important in our culture of a thousand beliefs, and no beliefs.

Jesus' promise to his disciples – *in my father's house there are many dwelling places and I go to prepare a place for you* – offers the hope and the reassurance by which many commend their beloved dead to God's care.

There is an intellectual stance in our culture that rejects all possibility of there being *one* over-riding particular truth. We tend to say, 'reality is *our perception*.' Jesus' declaration – *I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* – may sound exclusive and even over-reaching.

We Christians would do well to recall the universal scope of Christ's work, and the 'other flocks' of whom Jesus spoke in John 10:16. Jesus' words are not a restriction on the grace of God to only those who profess explicit faith in Christ. As a clergy friend said to me recently, 'I do not believe God has only one name.'

It is the evening of the last supper. Jesus' words to his *followers* are spoken at the edge of Jesus' own grave. It's a family conversation. Jesus encourages his followers to trust in him and not to fear, there will be a continuing relationship that transcends his death. Jesus also affirms their communal faith that he is the Messiah.

I think of the many bedside/deathbed family conversations I have attended as chaplain. The dying and the gathered family seek mutual assurances that life will go on – for all of them. Though they will soon be separated by death, their love will continue, this is not goodbye so much as 'see you later'. I recall with a smile a close friend who asked for the finest scotch to be served at his memorial reception, and added the caveat, 'remember, I will be watching.'

I hear Jesus' words of comfort in these chaplain conversations, not stated in

in the language of our Christian belief but in the universal language of humanity, compassion and love. So, too, Jesus words in John 14 speak of his compassion, his incarnate love, and his life lived in God.

*I am the way, the truth and the life.* Could this mean, not three separate things, but a single thought: I am the way: that is, the truth and the life. Jesus pointing to the way of his own life as love incarnate, God's eternal truth. Life as outward and active commitment, participation in the very being of God.

What would free the human heart from being fearful, from being troubled? While many would answer differently, Jesus' answer to his followers is, *believe in God, believe also in me*. Two thousand years later, Jesus' life is the way of love we know and trust – a proclamation of particularity of our faith, rather than exclusivity.

We trust that God, made known to us in Jesus, will handle the future of all who have *not* heard, or who have embraced another way to God.

I wonder. Did Jesus say, do not let your hearts (plural) be troubled (NRSV translation) or do not let your heart (singular) be troubled (as some scholars have urged)? For if the singular, (do not let your *heart* be troubled) then Jesus refers to the collective, the communal heart of discipleship.

Do not let the seasons of life, even when uncontrolled disease and death rage around us – do not let your communal heart be troubled. Life and love eternal continue; life in God continues.

There is room for everyone in the Father's house. A place for everyone, where joy and abundance replace scarcity and fear, where healing occurs, the hungry are fed and filled.

Jesus' departure will not, does not, cause *the community of disciples*, or the way of love, to come to an end. Jesus commissions the community to continue his ministry, expanding God's work in Christ through us. *If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.*

The image of 'many dwelling places' broadens our perspective, encourages us to breathe in the diversity and the inclusiveness of the Father's house. And we may begin to notice that the Father's many dwelling places are here on earth as well.

For the last eight or so weeks, we have gathered virtually, on line – greeting one another as each 'zooms in', appearing in a small photo block on our computer screen.

I truly enjoy the small glimpses of the space each of you chooses as your worship sanctuary. Your living room, kitchen, library or study – all of you have a place that is comfortable and ‘at home’ for you. Not your ‘dress up’ place, but your ‘at home’ space, made holy by our worship together.

In this world pandemic, ‘many dwelling places’ like ours are now the Church [capital C] at Sunday worship. Although separated into many different rooms, our community continues, the bonds of love and fidelity are not broken. Jesus assured his followers, *I will be there to greet you*. And so it is with us, as we gather for virtual worship. The Spirit fills our virtual church with love and joy and grace.

We are the building blocks of the church -- all of us in these little photo rectangles. Right there on your screen is the communal foundation of Christ Church. In the words of 1 Peter, we are living stones “built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

We are fed through our connection to the Eucharistic community, and we are transformed into Christ’s body. Here is the solidarity of the community, the presence of Christ in our lives, and the vision of our God who is eternally and ultimately real.

What are your expectations for your spiritual home? A home is more than a box in which to live. Likely, you have walked into a house or apartment that felt sterile, or sad, and also into homes that felt joyful, welcoming. That’s not so much about the size or dimensions of the place, or whether it is decorated with the newest colors, fashionable rugs or window coverings. Something intangible, something more, makes a house a home. That ‘something’ is not the same for everyone.

Home is a place that feels nurturing, a place where we feel peace, security, serenity. Free yourself to imagine a home that offers warmth, safety, security, love, hospitality – all of that.. What does it look like? What do you long for? Where is the Holy Spirit in your vision?

With an open heart and eye, tour the Christ Church sanctuary and Parish Hall. Your expression of home might suggest some changes to our church living environment, our communal home.

A commentary I read recently suggested this “what if”: What if God and Jesus took you in as a partner and consultant in designing the many rooms in the Father’s house ? What would you contribute to the universal preparations? How would you design a space that

would be uniquely yours, to reflect the special person God created *you* to be?  
I might furnish my room with the sound of my mother's laughter, my father's exuberant joy in his once a year venture into the kitchen to make a huge caldron of what he called beef goulash. I would furnish with the glow of early dawn, and a gentle breeze scented with the smell of the living ocean. My room would be a small, peaceful, intimate space in the vastness of the Father's house.

Our concept of home is tailored by experiences that have enriched us. And so it should be with our communal church home.

How do you encounter God in our church sanctuary, and how is that different for you in on-line worship? What might make Christ Church a more soul-filled place for you?

How – and where– are you nurtured? What feels utilitarian? What orients you to outward mission? Where or what features would you point out to a newcomer, not as objects of devotion, but as spaces that feed your soul?

And in turn, what changes might bring our virtual worship more in tune with your spiritual needs? We are tiring of our social isolation, of these virtual services as the solo option, and we miss the taste of communion.

We are offered a unique opportunity for relationship with God and God's people as we worship in virtual community. We are not diminished, no matter what else does or does not come our way.

There is life to be celebrated, here, in our on-line worship, as well as in our church buildings.

Let us wait patiently, with love, for it to be safe to return to our buildings.

May the solidarity of our community, the presence of Christ in our lives, and the vision of the eternal God who loves and nurtures us continue to grace our faith journey together.

Amen

The Rev. Diane Ramerman  
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