

Pastor Jon's Sermon on May 7, 2023 based on John 14:1-14

“A Place for You!”

Bob Dylan once sang “They say in my Father's house there are many mansions, but each one has a fireproof floor.” This was after his conversion to Christianity from Judaism. It was in the song, “A Sweetheart Like You”. Dylan interpreted John 14 as the promise of heaven for believers and protection from the gates of hell.

That's one interpretation of John 14. But there is so much more to this text and to our faith in Jesus than just going to heaven. So much of what I think about each day is “How can I be a faithful spouse, a good Christian parent, and a healthy pastor, all while living ethically with the love of Jesus in my heart. And yet as a human I know I fall short daily and need to rely on the grace of God for myself and others.

The context of John 14 is Jesus is about to leave his disciples behind. He had talked about his death for a while now. Losing someone is troubling. Here Jesus is sharing what is known as his final discourse in John 13-17. It takes place at the last supper where Jesus started the meal by shocking his disciples, taking on the role of the household slave, and washing the disciple's feet. He then commanded them to love one another as he first loved them... to serve one another like him.

It is almost like a professor's final lecture to his or her students... or a graduation speech.

If you knew your time on earth was coming to an end, what would you share with those closest to you? I love you. Please forgive me. I'm sorry. Keep the faith. Take care of mom or dad. Watch out for your siblings.

Martin Luther allegedly said, "If I knew that tomorrow was the end of the world, I would plant an apple tree today!" Do something productive and hopeful.

Jim Valvano, Legendary basketball coach for NC State said in his final public speech before dying of cancer, ““To me there are three things everyone should do every day. Number one is laugh. Number

two is think -- spend some time in thought. Number three, you should have your emotions move you to tears. If you laugh, think and cry, that's a heck of a day.”

Our Gospel for today is filled with Jesus' final words and promises to his followers. I was taught in seminary when God makes a promise in the Bible, God always keeps it.

Jesus starts off by saying, do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. The whole purpose of John's Gospel is so people come to believe in Jesus as God's Son and Savior through his words and signs. Soon, Jesus will be arrested, mocked, beaten and sent to the cross. This would be troubling. But Jesus is giving his disciples and us a way to get through the hard times.

Then Jesus makes a promise. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places, or mansions. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself.

Here Jesus promises to prepare a place for us and come and take us to himself. This text is often shared at funerals. One could take this literally and imagine a big house with lots of rooms in heaven waiting for us. And Jesus prepares a room just for you. And he will come and take you home when the time comes. It is a comforting image... one I preach often.

But the Greek words for Father's house is oikos, where we get the English word economy. In God's economy, there is a place for everyone. There are many dwelling places... or John's favorite Greek word, meno. It means abiding place... a place to abide or dwell with God now and in eternity. Here I think Jesus is saying, abiding with God is a way for us to live now.

And the way to abide with God is through a relationship with Jesus. Jesus says, “If you know you will know my Father.” According to Hebrews 1:3 Jesus is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being and sustains all things with a powerful word. So to answer Thomas' question “How can we know the way to

where Jesus is going?” Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.” Faith in Jesus is the way to an abiding relationship with God... a road map if you will. Having a relationship with Jesus means you will dwell with him, eat with him at his table, and listen his word, spend time thinking about him, join his followers in community, and do acts of justice.

Next, Jesus says in me you will find the truth. In a world where the truth seems to be a commodity. This convicts me... because in our world today, it's easy find the “truth” we want to hear in our news feeds. And we like our free news don't we? But if we aren't careful, we will only get our news from Facebook, or our favorite podcast or Youtube videos. But I learned recently while watching the White House Press Correspondents dinner that in order to get fair and balanced news from responsible journalists, you may have to pay for it... much responsible journalism resides behind a pay wall. I need to think about this... that in order to keep ethical journalists employed and able to feed their families, you may have to pay for it.

And the life is this idea of an abundant life right now. Believing in Jesus is life now. We look for life in many places other than God. In John 6, Jesus says when you come to him and place your trust in him as the Bread of life, “You will never be hungry or never be thirsty again. You will never feel like you need more in your life. You will find contentment.

The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4, I know what it is like to plenty and to be in want, but in all these things, I have learned the secret of being content... contentment for Paul simply is through Knowing Jesus Christ as his Lord.

We need to keep in mind that in this text that Jesus is teaching his students. It sounds exclusive... that the only way to the Father is through a relationship with Jesus. And as I Christian, I believe this, but also Jesus teaches not to judge others.

Remember, in John 3:16, Jesus' came out of God's love for the whole world. We are to treat all people with the abundant love Jesus demonstrated during the footwashing and throughout his ministry. If that opens doors to conversation and possibly conversion, wonderful.

Then that is a by-product of loving as Jesus first loved us and the gift of the Holy Spirit to work faith.