

The holy gospel according to John...**Glory to you, O Lord**

Gospel: John 14:1-14

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In 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? ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” ⁹Jesus 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’? ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹Believe 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. ¹²Very 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. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

The gospel of the Lord...**Praise to you, O Christ**

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace from
God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

This scripture lesson is often read at funerals. Jesus says, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” I find it comforting that there is a place prepared for me...

The word translated into “dwelling places” literally means “places of abiding”. Some translations use the words Mansions or rooms... I like “dwelling places” because in the gospel of John it’s a big theme, abiding and dwelling is something that the gospel of John emphasizes, over and again...

The phrase “in my father's house” is used earlier in the Gospel of John and it takes on a specific meaning. In chapter 2, Jesus initially refers to “my father's house” as meaning the temple, the building itself. The place where God was thought to reside, in the Holy of Holies...

And as we remember, Jesus tells a group of followers, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Gospel of John makes a clear point that Jesus was speaking of the temple of his actual body, and his resurrection.

By creating this metaphor of Jesus as the Temple, Jesus is telling us that God’s presence is not contained in the building, but rather dwelling in the living flesh of Jesus. In this way, Jesus is Emanuel, God with us...

And so, when Jesus says, in my father's house, there are many dwelling places. The metaphor that is created is, Jesus is the Temple and we are those dwelling places... In and through Jesus, God comes and dwells within us, abides with us. And conversely, we abide with God...

Through our baptism, God chooses us, and we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. We become a Saint and a co-worker in the kingdom of heaven. You are a dwelling place of God. Here on earth, and hereafter in heaven.

This morning I'd like to do some reflecting with this idea of being a dwelling place of God. Also, in our gospel lesson, Jesus says I am the way, the truth and the life. So, what does it mean to be a dwelling place, and what is this way, this truth and this life?

Quick story... Ruth was a very special person. I got to know her when she was in her nineties. She lived independently in her own apartment. She was a career teacher, a gracious person who lived by example and I loved visiting with her.

It was hard for Ruth to come to church; she had to use a walker. Walkers are great for balance, but a real pain to get in and out of cars and doors and pews... But Ruth was determined. She always made a special effort to come, and sometimes I picked her up myself.

And not only did Ruth make a special effort to attend worship, she also made a special effort to be a part of the fellowship, Ruth would regularly come to the suppers and bible studies and all the other activities...

It was also difficult for her to hear everything that was going on. In fact, during bible studies, she would sit right next to me, so she had a better chance of hearing what was going on.

I visited with her in her apartment one day; and she started talking about how important church was for her. She talked about growing up in the church. She talked about raising her family in the church. All her friends in the church... At one point she said, "I have to be there, that's my family."

Ruth was a dwelling place of God, and the most natural thing for her, was to dwell in worship and fellowship... Church was like a homing beacon for her, she was determined to dwell in the body of Christ.

Ruth was full of wisdom that comes from knowing God in an intimate and loving way. Her smile was infectious. She radiated God's love... She was always so loving, kind and gracious... After visiting Ruth, I always felt blessed.

This dwelling in the Word, this dwelling in the community of Saints, this dwelling in love and forgiveness-- it leads to people who are loving, kind and gracious. What goes around, comes around... This is exactly the way, the truth and the life...

When Ruth passed away, I read this gospel lesson at her funeral. Ruth was a dwelling place of God, and through resurrection, Ruth is now with God in a dwelling place. As we say, here on earth and hereafter in Heaven.

This story of Ruth brings me to reflect on our current situation where we are social distancing. We are not worshipping together in person as congregations. And to be honest, my heart aches, and I really miss the handshakes, the greetings, the fellowship, the jokes and shared stories... Like all of you, I really want everything to go back to normal.

And I've been grieving this... Perhaps it's good that we have this funeral text this week. Being church in this time has been hard. We can make phone calls and videos and all that stuff, but it's not the same as being physically present with one another. Worship and fellowship are part of our DNA... It's what we do as church... It's kind of the meaning behind the Communion of Saints.

The spiritual practice of fasting means we refrain from something, with the idea that we pay attention to how much it really means to us. Kind of like the idea that absence make the heart grow fonder. In a way, this virus has put all of us on a spiritual fast. The fast of not being together in person.

And truthfully, I believe our perspective about church will change because of it. And I wonder how it will change? Will there be a new awareness of community, a new appreciation for dwelling together? I don't know, but I sure hope so...

Fundamentally, we are people of the resurrection, we see things through a different lens. Exactly because we are dwelling places of God, we will find new ways of dwelling together. I have absolutely no doubt...

And to be honest, I don't know what it will look like. I don't know what next month or next year looks like! But I trust in the Body of Christ. I trust in our dwelling together, and I trust in our collective presence and wisdom.

When the world out there is dividing things up into their political and cultural camps, we're different. As we dwell together, we appreciate our differences, we include one another, and that makes us stronger and for the sake of the world.

The Holy Spirit continues to blow amongst us. We might not always know where it comes from or where it's going, but we sure feel it. God is indeed creating something new through all this, and we might not know what it is, yet, but we sure know it's happening! Resurrection is happening.

So, let's be intentional about being dwelling places of God, let's explore new ways of dwelling together, and let us share our stories of being the body of Christ together... Because, in our Father's house there are many dwelling places...

Amen...