

*A Sermon Preached by Father Dwight D. Duncan, ssc - Rector, St Matthias' Church, Dallas, Texas*

**4/24/05**

**EASTER V**

**John 14:1-14, Year A**

*“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? In nomine ❖*

Please do this right now: close your eyes. Now, as I say the following words, try to get in touch with your reaction to them: *there is a place for you, a home prepared for you* ..... Now you can open your eyes upon me, poor dears!

What did you find, what did you feel? I would be dumbstruck if any human being, hearing this promise, did not feel some longing and hope. To have a place, a home! The words speak of belonging ... of rest and refreshment ... of being enfolded in care so that wounds can heal and you can grow healthy because, while accepted where you are, you are never left there: confrontation and challenge are fulfilled in encouragement and support.

Our hearts long and hope for a place with others, a home in which we belong. And even if the places in which we have been or are, the homes we have had or have, wreath our hearts with gladness, none fulfill, none satisfy.

None can because, first of all, they never were meant to. This place, this home, this earthly life, and all our places and homes within it are but a moment in the eternity for which we have been created, a place of preparation for that which is yet to be. *Preparation, NOT fulfillment.*

But here the sadness: no place, no home here, can measure up even to what it was meant to be for us in this place of preparation, because each place, each home is filled with inhabitants *out for themselves*, rather than *out for one another*. We are sinners, locked in battle with God through our battles with one another, each of us struggling to have things our way ... to be the one in the right, the others in the wrong ... to be on top, the others on the bottom.

Do you remember the consequence this brought us, through our father Adam and mother Eve? We lost our place in our garden home with God.

And do you remember the first curse inflicted on us, through our brother Cain? He slew his brother, didn't he, an act which reveals what every sin at root is: murder, getting rid of whatever is in your way. What happened to Cain? He was not slain. No. He was doomed to walk to and fro, marked, shunned, no permanent place, no home. To one degree or another, this is tasted by each of us, his brothers and sisters. So our hearts are troubled, troubled indeed.

And yet, Jesus has said, “Let this not be. Believe in God, believe also in me.” This is the antidote, the cure, for troubled hearts: believing in God, believing in Jesus. But what does it mean, “believe?” Is this fulfilled by some assent of my mind and my spirit to the notion that Jesus is Lord and Savior?

NO. The antidote, the cure, for troubled hearts requires the costly enfleshment in one's life of such assent and trust. It requires, in other words, that we literally enact in our lives what the word "believe" means: "live by." To believe means to live by that in which you put your trust. So to believe in God, to believe in Jesus, means to align our wills and our actions with his. It is only that alignment which brings peace to troubled hearts.

To believe in God, to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior is/means/requires living towards others as Jesus lives towards us. And how is that? As *friend*. This is what Jesus proved himself to be to our apostolic fathers. He took them to himself, providing for them *in himself* a place of rest and refreshment ... a place in which they could grow into more than they were because with him they were free to fall into being their petty, nasty, competitive selves without ending up being rejected, but lovingly rebuked and challenged ... with him they were free to fail, to mess-up, and to discover that failure was not an end, but a beginning from which one could learn and grow.

That is what Jesus has done *to* you and me, *for* you and me. In Baptism, he has taken us to himself ... yes. But in taking us to himself, Jesus has joined us to everyone who has a place, a home in him, binding us to one another as friends.

This then is our vocation, our calling: to become what in fact we are in Jesus, friends of one another, a community of friendship. We are given to one another to practice on one another the art of friendship.

God knows, and we do as well, how difficult that will be for each of us and how costly, for we provide one another a banquet-full of reasons to be enemies of one another rather than friends. The art of friendship with people whom you may not like, who irritate you, who disappoint you, who make life harder for you, who hurt you ... enacting friendship to them is like shedding blood. BUT how can we receive from others, that which we are not willing to give to them?

On the wall of the breakfast area in my home is a work of art by the noted Christian artist, Michael. In his compositions, phrases scrolled in beautiful calligraphy become images of themselves. So, in Michael's device on our wall, black letters form the outline of a house. Those letters say: "We need to have people who mean something to us, people we can turn to ..."

It is at this point, precisely where the entrance to a home would be, that the letters bend into the house, becoming blood red, circling to form a heart, at the end of which is a cross. These bloody letters say, "So that being with them is like coming home."

*We need to have people who mean something to us, people we can turn to;*

*So that being with them is like coming home.*

Indeed we do need these. And others need us to be these for them.

Centuries ago, Jewish rabbis had a favorite designation for God, a nickname we might say. God's true name was too sacred even to pronounce aloud. So they spoke of God indirectly, the way we look at an eclipse in order to prevent the damage which would occur from a direct stare. This was

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their nickname for God, and I think, at least for me, it is better than his actual one:

**THE PLACE**

God is our beginning and our end. He is the Place from which we have come, the Place to which we are going: a heart big enough to suffer, forebear, and contain us all. And that heart beats on our hearts, saying, "Open up. Make a place in your heart for all."

[Jesus said,] *"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* John 14:1-3