



Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A

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Gospel Text - John 14:-1-14

John 14:1-14

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

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 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'? 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. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves. 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. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

SERMON TEXT:

As a child, Christian radio was a staple in my home. I think my mother thought it was a safe choice for my siblings and me to listen to because she knew there wouldn't be any swearing, but, as it is with a lot of contemporary Christian music, we did hear some questionable theology.

However, there was this one song called "Big House," by the band Audio Adrenaline, that we loved to sing. The chorus goes, "Come and go with me to my Father's house. Come and go with me to my Father's house. It's a big, big house, with lots and lots of room. A big, big table, with lots and lots of food. A big, big yard, where we can play football. A big, big house. It's my Father's house." Now, this is a silly song, and I cannot fathom a house big enough for all of God's people, but honestly I can't believe that God would play football when I think God's favorite sport is hockey. Nevertheless, this song and our gospel message embody the "All Are Welcome" phrase we as Christians try to live by.

As I was thinking about this text, reflecting on Jesus' words, this song started playing in my head. And it struck me how lucky I was as a kid because I had a plethora of friends and homes that would welcome me inside. But more specifically, it made me realize that my parents "Always Welcome" policy wasn't just to be the cool parents that everyone knew and loved. It was to let my siblings and my friends know that no matter what happened, there was a place for them.

My father taught us that it is always better to set a longer table than build a higher fence. Because what did building a higher fence do, but keep people out? As we have read in our scriptures and we experience in our world today, denying space and love to people always has consequences.

For example, homelessness is a critical issue for America's youth. According to the True Colors Fund, a nonprofit organization working to end homelessness in the LGBTQ community, 1.6 million youth are homeless each year. And okay, maybe we don't want to go there, maybe we don't think this is an issue in our communities, but if we don't want to think about homelessness,

what about youth simply feeling unsafe at home? What about our beloved children not having money for enough food? What kind of future is created, when those we task with creating it, can't find a place to rest at ease?

I hope and pray that you all had and have people in your life that no matter what happens, you can go to them and they will wrap you in a hug that heals whatever wound is there. Because the beautiful truth of the hospitality of Christ is that when we welcome others in, God's love grows. And it grows like fruit on unruly vines that cannot be tamed.

In our Gospel for today, Jesus is telling the disciples that where he is going, they cannot come. Not because they are unwelcome, but because he will be crucified and raised from the dead.

Yes, although we are in the season of Easter and post resurrection, this passage happens during the last supper. It is important for me to put it in this context because for a long time, I believed this text to be after Jesus had relieved himself to the disciples because that is when we read it in our lectionary! But it is

not. Jesus is still telling the disciples the message to address their anxiety of the building tension between Jesus and the high authorities.

So many of us forget this context when we read, "It is only through Christ that we can receive salvation in death because it does make a difference. Out of context, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," sounds pretty rigid. Scholars argue over and over again because some want this to be interpreted with an exclusionary lens. When others know that the translation and context of Jesus' speech is often misunderstood to be the ultimate truth when Jesus is simply comforting his friends and trying to ready them for what is to come.

Indeed, I believe this is a message of comfort for the disciples, not a message of condemnation for everyone else. I believe deeply in the way, the truth, and the life that Christ brought to the world and the Spirit leads us to. And because of that, because of God's radical love and hospitality to all people, we must believe that in God's house, there is room for everyone.

Professor Angela Parker who teaches at McAfee school of theology reminds us that Jesus states in verse 12 “the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.” Our greater works must exhibit the way, the truth, and the life for communities that continue to be disconnected and denied access to all of the areas that can bring abundant life such as quality food, access to medical care, affordable housing, and continued dignity no matter what their identities are. That is the way, the truth, and the life for a collective people with a singular heart. The kingdom of God.

It may feel overwhelming to try to tackle a multitude of issues keeping us from the unity of God’s love. But beloved, what we know is that we are not doing this alone. What we know is that it starts out small. What we know is that faith and love the size of a mustard seed can grow and grow and grow into full bloom. And keep blooming after that.

What we can do now might be the simplest and smallest thing like having someone over for dinner, or maybe building relationships with neighbors. It starts with a, “You are always

welcome here,” and ends with someone feeling loved, validated, and safe. It’s simple and difficult all at once. Yet, it is the divine hospitality we are called to as people of God.

So I leave you with this discernment. Just as God’s house has many dwelling places and makes room for us there. How can we make room for God’s people in our everyday lives? Because you are always welcome in the family of God. Amen.

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