

Sermon for May 14, 2017 – “Home”

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A – Texts: John 14:1-14

Westwood First Presbyterian Church

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The overarching message of John’s gospel is, first and foremost, the divinity of Jesus. Never more so than in this week’s gospel. I love the imagery it evokes; of Jesus preparing a place for us in His Father’s house, echoing the last verse of Psalm 23 where we’re reminded that we will “dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.” The passage today is part of a larger discourse; three entire chapters (fourteen through sixteen), four if you include Jesus’ prayer for the disciples in the chapter that follows (seventeen). It’s one of Christ’s last lessons before the crucifixion. We reflect on it now, during the Easter season, because it’s a forecast that really only makes sense in the context of the Resurrection. Before this, Jesus had been hinting about His leaving the disciples, now He suddenly springs it on them: **“I go now to prepare a place for you.”** This bombshell really gets their attention. In a flash Thomas and Philip are all over this...Hey, wait a minute. You’re going where? To do what? To make a point, Jesus often uses Peter in the role of “everyman”. He’s good-hearted and is usually pretty compliant. By contrast, Thomas is “everyman” with an attitude. He’s the perennial sceptic. He needs convincing. Philip is another story. He is Johnny-on-the-spot...receptive, helpful, eager to please. In framing this dialogue, first with doubting Thomas and then with enthusiastic Philip, Jesus is boxing the compass of personalities. He’s illustrating that there are many dwelling places in his Father’s house. He’s telling them that there’s room for Peters and Thomas’ and Phillips. And, by extension, room for all of us in our diversity. We’re not meant to be cookie-cutter Christians. We’re all called to follow Christ, but not in lock-step.

For the same reason that this text is an Easter message, it’s also a favorite for funeral services. It puts life and after-life in perspective. It’s life’s ultimate orientation class. It tells us where we are, where we’re going, and how to get there. It comforts. It inspires. **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in Me... “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** The Resurrection is the payoff to this promise. Jesus is pointing the way home. He’s telling us there are tough times ahead, but, don’t be afraid – trust Me. The Father and I are one. Stick with Me and I’ll stick with you. Follow Me, and I will take you home.

Still, as comforting as this all is, this dialogue raises some unsettling questions. I mean, what’s all this going home stuff about? Our senses tell us that right **here**, right **now** is the only home we know. But Jesus is telling us that this is **not** our home. Sure, we have roots, we have homes, we have an address, we have family and friends, but we’re not **home**. We’re kind of like passengers on a jet aircraft. I mean, our surroundings appear to be stable and safe. When we are, in fact, hurtling through space in a thin metal tube. This life is a passage, **not** a destination. The passage may be first-class with fine wines and filet-mignon. It may also be economy: squalid, cramped, uncomfortable without even a lousy bag of peanuts. Whatever the amenities, we must never mistake this passage for home.

Karl Barth, probably the greatest theologian of the 20th Century, was lecturing once to a group of students at Princeton University. One student asked him a question, one that’s probably crossed our minds from time to time. “Sir,” said the student, “don’t you think that God has revealed Himself in other religions and not only in Christianity?”

Barth's answer stunned the crowd. He said: "No, God has not revealed Himself in any religion, including Christianity. "He has revealed Himself in His Son". That is the challenge and the scandal of our faith. That is the great claim that Jesus makes, and the great stumbling block for many people. We're not called to believe in a religion nor to follow the teachings of a religion. We are called to follow Jesus Christ. It's as simple as that. **"I am the way, the truth and the life...; "No one comes to the Father but by Me."** Lots of Christians spend lots of time apologizing for that statement. I think we need to stop. At the same time, we need to ask ourselves: If Jesus is in fact the way, are we following it? Are we following the way? Are we following Him?

As People of the Way we are to be His image bearers in the world. We are called to connect people to the Lord, to bring them to the Way that we have found. We do that by proclaiming in our words and in our deeds the mighty acts of the one who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. And by speaking about what He has done in our lives the prayers answered, the lessons we've learned, the strength we've found beyond ourselves that has sustained us in difficult times, the little miracles, the often-unexpected miracles. Our experience with Jesus is an experience that is meant to be shared not hidden for fear that we might somehow be offending others, that we might somehow be judging others.

The earliest Christians referred to themselves as the "people of the Way". We who proclaim Christ as Lord, who proclaim that He is risen indeed are likewise "people of the Way". Our job is to point to the Way. Our job is to follow the Way. That means actively, deliberately, constantly make Christ's way our way as we make our way home to the place He's prepared for us!

Christ is risen indeed!

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.