

## ***The Importance of Home***

A sermon preached by

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### **John 14:1-14**

*14* “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 me 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.

Somehow when I did my planning for today several months ago, I didn’t get the memo that this Gospel lesson would be the reading on Mother’s Day. Earlier this week when I began my study in earnest I thought to myself... “Well of course this is the reading for today because in today’s reading there are thirteen instances of the word *Father*.”

I grew up in a time when there were still arguments going on about the church’s and culture’s dependence on solely male images for God. Today, it’s generally accepted that when we say God, the image is far broader and more expansive than an old guy in a white beard. And sadly for many of us, because we know the word Father isn’t the only way to refer to God, it has become a sort of third rail that we won’t touch because of the ways it has been used to *obscure* the experience of God rather than enlighten it.

The last thing we need is thirteen more fathers, especially on Mother’s Day. Despite our best efforts in the search for language to convey this broader meaning, we are still left with the

abuse of such male dominated images. We've used the Find/Replace tools on our word processors and inserted mother, creator, ground of being -- the list goes on. Today I think what John is trying to convey is something like "intimate loving Creator" instead.

Now before you think I've gone way too far over the edge of political correctness, consider the fact that perhaps John is trying to make a serious point here and that 13 references in such a short space is not about talking about God in a general, generic sense, like a religious leader who prays incessantly to "Father God" as if it's a digital recording that has been corrupted and repeats itself over and over again. Instead I think that John's use of this language highlights a particular understanding of and relationship to the divine.

In an age of pluralism, acceptance, and appreciation for the religious and spiritual beliefs of our neighbors, this understanding of God can make us feel a certain amount of discomfort. Yet, John's perspective does point toward the boundaries that inform our belief. This is who we are. We are the people who believe in the God who has been revealed to us decisively in Jesus Christ.

But this is not the way that some parts of the church have applied these boundaries. "No one comes to the Father except through me" is not a statement of who is "in" and who is "out" with God. This is, after all, the same Jesus who said "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also..."

Instead, this language is the very concrete and specific affirmation of a faith community that knows God through the incarnation. God is the One whom the disciples come to recognize in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Contrary to the ways this passage has often been used, John is not propagating an exclusive religion: "Only our religion out of the thousands is correct and the rest of you are going to hell." But instead he is pointing to an understanding of God and a way to God that involves a sense of presence and of intimacy.

When we hear Jesus say, "In my Father's house," he is not talking about home as a place. In fact that word could better be translated "household or family." It is not about going to a place, it is about the relationships that make the place home. Jesus is going to prepare their place, wherever that may be and whenever they will need it, because he already loves them. All through the Book of John, the writer is trying to share the importance of knowing Jesus. He stresses the signs that point to who Jesus is and not to the miracle itself. Jesus' long speeches

and *I am* statements point to the ways the disciples can relate to Jesus. He speaks of the connections they share and the difference this will make in their lives.

John's use of the word "household or family" rather than "house or building" gives the sense of community and relationship. In the family there are many ways of being or dwelling, to *abide* or dwell with him. Abiding with Jesus weaves its way throughout John as a formative idea.

Jesus tells the disciples and us something important about where he is going. Going *to the Father* is then a relationship, not a place. These many dwelling places reveal to us not changes in geography, but changes of heart. It is an ongoing thing, because it has already been done for us in some sense, and remains a future hope as well. Understandably, the disciples are uncertain about how to get where he is going. Jesus assures them that he himself is the way. That word can mean path or road, or can be used to mean way of life or practice. Life with him is not a destination or an accomplishment—or a victory won—as much as it is a way of being and becoming.

This week during our staff meeting, I asked the staff to reflect upon their images of home. For some it was a place, a house built by a father, a farm worked by family, an enduring sense of permanence...but inevitably in our descriptions, the sense of place gave way to the relationships that they represented.

Indeed, that is why the passage does speak to us on any day that we reflect upon the primary and principal relationships in our lives. All of us have a mother or sometimes two. Some of you are mothers, some of you had hoped to be mothers, some have lost your birth mothers through death or being offered to another family for adoption. These images of home are many and varied. Many involve joy, some involve pain, but all of them point to a journey, a path, a way that points toward a creative, intimate, loving divine presence that creates a space, a place for transformation in our lives.

And just as God dwells in the son, so too does this divine relationship dwell in us, daughter and sons of the mothers that have given us birth, the mothers that have nurtured and cared for us, the mothers that have given witness to hope and joy, the mothers that have taught us to care for others and the world, and the mothers who have left us in body, mind, or spirit.

In them, we have been offered a place where transformation can happen. A change of heart from troubled to peace-filled embraces us as disciples who have learned along our way that

Jesus has come with us, and goes ahead to prepare a place. A destination like this changes everything. Companionship like this changes everything. For we have found our dwelling place. AMEN.