

The Way Home©

John 14:1-14

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I love this passage so much because of its promises, it's comfort, and it's hope. This is a Scripture that I use so often when preaching for a Witness to the Resurrection Service – that is what our Presbyterian Book of Common Worship calls a Funeral Service. We are witnessing – testifying that because of the power of the cross and resurrection, we have this promise that death is not the end. There is this dwelling place with God.

Many of us know this passage from the King James Version that says, “In my Father’s house are many mansions. I led a bible study at a Presbyterian Manor for a while. As we studied John and came to this chapter I asked the residents there which translation they preferred. Of course, it was the King James, which I expected from this generation who grew up with that translation.

But they told me it wasn’t as much about the translation as it was the word itself. They said that the word “mansion” to them meant a very large, very spacious place – where there was room for everyone. That was a comfort and a great promise for them.

As I was reflecting on that heavenly home with many dwelling places or mansions – lots and lots of room – I let myself think of what image came to mind.

For me, the home that I have carried in my mind all these years was my grandmother DeHaven’s house. We called my grandmother “Nanny Ma.” That’s how “Grandma came out when I first started talking, and it stuck with all of us.

Nanny Ma’s house wasn’t a fancy home but it had lots of rooms. It was an old, 2-story house with 4 large bedrooms upstairs and 1 very large bedroom downstairs. It had lots of windows, a very big bathroom with a clawfoot tub; it had a wide front stairway and a very steep back stairway, which I fell all the way down, a kitchen, a back porch where the icebox was. There was a large dining room, and two sitting rooms, one with a large stove that had a pipe that went up into the room where I slept.

We lived with Nanny Ma and my great-grandmother for a year when I was 5, plus I spent many Saturday nights staying over with her.

One of my favorite things about being at her house was the front porch. It was one of those that wrapped around the side of the house and it had a porch swing that we sat in together, so often, watching the cars go by, talking about things going on in my life and hers, chatting with the neighbors.

That is the spacious dwelling place I think of when I think of home – even more than the farmhouse I grew up in that my stepdad still lives in. Believe me, sharing my room with 2 little sisters did not feel spacious at all.

What is your image of a large and spacious home – a place where there is lots and lots of room? What are the things about it that make it so special? What memories do you have that make you smile, that you cherish? Where is this home? Can you still go there?

Jesus talked to his disciples about his Father's home – a place that has lots of room. Call it a home with many dwellings places. Call it a mansion. The point is there is room. Room for many. Room for God's children to live. Forever.

Jesus was preparing his disciples for his leaving. He was trying to assure them that it would be okay; that death would not be the end. In fact, the resurrection was not even the end. There was life after all that.

John is very focused on Jesus as the incarnation – that is, God who came to earth as the human – as Jesus, the Son. In fact, we hear Jesus telling Philip, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. You know the Father through me and through the things you have seen me do."

Jesus knows that the disciples have known the incarnate Jesus. Truly human. Yet somehow God. They have come to see this in Jesus – sort of. As much as their own understanding would allow, which I think we can all relate to. It's not easy – in fact, I am willing to say that it's fairly impossible to completely understand the incarnation – the "Word made Flesh" as John says in his first chapter.

Yet, however the disciples understood all that, it is how they knew him. They knew he was very special, unique, they claimed to believe that he was the Messiah – the anointed one from God.

And now, in a short time, that incarnated Jesus would be gone. The person of Jesus, the friend, the human who felt what they felt, who laughed with them and cried tears of joy and sorrow with them, the one who taught them so much, who healed, who had such compassion for others, who was not afraid to speak out to those who were oppressive – that God in Jesus would be gone from their presence.

How would it be possible to go on? What did the future hold? And what would happen to them?

Jesus tells them they know the way to where he is going. He says they already have the road map to get there, even though he will come back to take them there himself.

Thomas speaks up and says, "Lord, we don't even really know where you are going. How can we possibly know the way?"

And here Jesus assures him and all of them, and all of us as well. “You do know the way. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life.” Here is but one of the many “I Am” saying that John includes in his gospel.

What are some of the other “I Am” sayings of Jesus? Can you remember some of them?

“I Am The Light Of The World”

“I Am The Bread Of Life”

“I Am The True Vine, My Father Is The Gardener”

“I Am The Vine, You Are The Branches”

“I Am The Good Shepherd”

“I Am The Gate For The Sheep”

“I Am The Resurrection And The Life”

“I Am In The Father And The Father Is In Me”

God has given us a way to know God and a promise that we have a home with God, through his Son, Jesus.

Why would we not put our trust in him? He has shown us so much, he has given us his all!

It may seem kind of strange that we are even talking about this Scripture, these words of Jesus that were said at this particular time that was just before Jesus was crucified.

I mean, we are now into the 5th Sunday of Easter – we are still celebrating the resurrection. Jesus didn’t stay dead. He is back!

But the focus here is the promise of home. Jesus promises so much in this passage that assures his friends – those back in his time, and those of us who are his friends and followers today – that death is not the end. That even being raised from death is not the end.

The point is that there is great promise of a home with God where there is enough room for all God’s children and that Jesus shows us the way to God. As we know Jesus; as we study who he is and what he has done, and as we come to know him as our friend and Savior – we can know God as well.

By the way, Nanny Ma’s big spacious house that I love so much? It’s long gone. She sold it and then it sold again and the neighborhood deteriorated. Eventually a tree was growing up right through the sitting room where the stove was and up into my old bedroom. The stairs were falling down.

I went into it just before it was torn down and I got the stained glass window that I had touched so many times going up the stairs.

Like earthly bodies, earthly homes don't last forever.

But the eternal dwelling place that Jesus promises us? It will be forever and ever. Our bodies, no longer needed as they are, will die, but what makes us *us*, our spirits, will be raised by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and he will take us to that eternal, everlasting home. That dwelling place with God.

We know the way home. We know it through Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Through the power of the cross, the chains that kept us bound to die, the sin that overwhelmed us have been torn away. In the cross of Jesus and in the resurrection we have freedom and life forever. We have an eternal home.

Amen

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