

The Great Building Project©

John 14:1-14

May 14, 2017

Rev. Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates

The first few verses of this text in John are familiar to many of us. It is one I have used often for funerals because I find it so reassuring, so promising to hear Jesus say that he is going to prepare a place for us and that he will come back for us and take us there to be with him. I believe Jesus said this and if he said it then it must be true. As a pastor who ministers to grieving people at the time when a loved one dies, it is the foundation of my being able to comfort and assure others that all is well, in spite of grief.

There are several different ways the Greek is translated here. The King James Version is translated as “In my Father’s house are many *mansions*.” Other translations use the word “rooms” or “many dwelling places.”

Does it make any difference to you which words are used to describe this great building project that is going on in heaven? I asked a group of residents at the Presbyterian Manor, when I was still in Kansas. I was doing a study on John with them. They all said they liked the word *mansions* best. The idea of mansions in heaven portrayed a big, spacious place with plenty of room for everyone.

In Bible study this last Wednesday, it was pointed out that for those who were in assisted living or a nursing home, it would especially be meaningful. After all, they were confined to a small living space – perhaps a tiny apartment, but for many – just a small room that they might even share with another resident.

Who wouldn’t want to live in a spacious, fancy mansion with Jesus after experiencing that tight living place? But I think the important point Jesus is making here is that he promises to prepare a place for each person – whether it be a room, a dwelling place or a home in a mansion. He prepares it. He is building it. He will have it ready for us. He will not be unprepared.

In fact, he knows the right time for each one of us and he even promises to come to us and take us to be in that place with him.

13 years ago this month, my mother passed from this life to her eternal life with Jesus. She had been in the hospital several days, on a ventilator, but then they managed to take her off and thought she might be able to do okay. She could not.

So, my siblings and I were all gathered around her bed, singing to her, talking to her, loving her. And I have to say that right at the time of her taking her last breath, I felt another presence right there beside us. What had been labored breathing and an unresponsive look on her face, she suddenly changed as she turned her head in my direction and smiled. And then she was gone.

You can say that it was my imagination or wishful thinking but I am so sure of the truth in this passage that you would never be able to convince me of anything else. I firmly believe that we are safe in the Saviors arms when it is time to depart from this earthly body.

Jesus said, “You know the way to where I’m going.” Then Thomas – the one who had his doubts later after Jesus rose from the dead – said to Jesus, “we don’t even know where you’re going. How would we know the way?”

And this is the passage that people talk about: Jesus said, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’

So, is Jesus saying that unless a person believes in him, they will not enter heaven? They can never be in that eternal home? Are they doomed to eternal hell?

What about faithful people who are devout believers and worshippers of God, yet have not come to accept that Jesus truly is the promised Messiah? Would a loving God not accept those who do love him and try to obey him?

As Christians we certainly do believe that Jesus is the Savior, the Messiah – the Son of God. For us, Jesus is the way that we have come to know the Father. But, is there another way for others, I sometimes wonder.

What I believe is what John said back in chapter three. You remember it, I’m sure. That God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him would not die, but would have everlasting life.

According to John, God gave the ultimate sacrifice – His Son - to all the world because God loved the world so much. And because of that, it seems very important all would believe in him.

But what I also believe is that God, in his mercy and love, will not give up on us. God chases us, woos us to himself. And in the letter to the Philippians, Paul writes:

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

¹¹ And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
Philippians 2:9-11

We keep on trusting that God knows what God is doing. It will be revealed to us when the time is right. We keep on being obedient disciples, striving to share Christ with others.

This is actually one of the topics I’ll be preaching more on when I begin my sermon series based on the questions you wrote down a couple of Sunday’s ago. I will be starting that soon and will make sure you know what the schedule is for each topic.

But I want to look at something else in this passage. There is something that I think is even more significant than what we have interpreted as Jesus being the only way to God. Notice he says, “I AM the way, the truth, and the life.” Do any of those words remind you of other places in Scripture?

Remember in Exodus, when Moses came upon the burning bush and God started speaking to him, telling him to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let God’s people – the Israelites – go? And Moses said, “Who shall say has sent me?” And God answered, “I AM.” That’s it. Just I AM. That is the name.

What stands out to me in this statement of Jesus is the I AM. I AM the way, the truth and the life. And then that reminds me of the first chapter John writes in this gospel. You know, the one we love to hear on Christmas Eve –

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” John 14:14

And Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. The Father and I are one.”

For me, if ever there was a passage about incarnation – Emmanuel, God with us – this is it. “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”

Jesus assures his followers that they know God and can trust God because they know him and he knows us. In him is truth and life.

And Jesus says ask anything in my name and I will do it. Well. In Bible study I said if it really meant anything, I would be singing that song “Oh Lord, won’t you give me a Mercedes Benz. Or a blue sports car like Walt and Barb Brown’s.

But I don’t think that is really what Jesus means here. You notice he says it is to glorify God. And if we read further we see how he talks about us obeying his commandments. I’m pretty sure Jesus is talking about things that glorify God and are in tune with his commandments. It’s not about giving me a cute little sports car. I doubt God cares if I have one or not. I’m probably on my own in that regard.

So, what can we do as we wait? If Jesus really does come to take us home, what are we to do in the meantime? I think as Jesus is personally building a place for us – that great building project in heaven, as he prepares an eternal home for us, we too prepare ourselves for a strong foundation of spiritual faith by study and prayer and worship and giving.

We are working on a great building project while we wait for Jesus to return for us.

Like Matthew Kelly says:

“Our spiritual foundation is built like a skyscraper. You must dig deep for a strong foundation.”
Resisting Happiness by Matthew Kelly

We must dig deep so that the foundation of our faith that is everlasting is strong and solid as time goes by.