

John's gospel today brings us to Jesus preparing his disciples for his looming crucifixion and death. In a section of the text called the Farewell Discourse, Jesus spends a significant amount of time saying goodbye to his followers whom he now calls friends. This text may be familiar to you as it is a text often read during funerals which is appropriate: Grief and loss are very much present in the dialogue between Jesus and his followers. We hear it especially in the voice of Thomas who asks how could they know the way to where Jesus is going? How could they possibly know that? Thomas in this moment is lost and he is searching for Jesus even before he is gone. But the text is also full of love and hope as Jesus washes his friends' feet, as he leaves them final instructions on how to be together after he is gone, as he looks beyond his death to the rest of the work he will be doing, how he will always be with them.

Jesus tells his followers that he is going away to prepare a place, to prepare a room for them in his Father's house. Now we may be tempted to hear this as Jesus talking about a kind of house in heaven, waiting for God's people, but it is probably more likely that Jesus is using metaphor to describe a relationship between God and God's people. That rather than a kind of celestial building the souls of the departed would abide in, living, breathing followers would find in God a home. Scholars link the metaphor of house with the hospitality shown in the foot washing Jesus had performed and so the whole of Jesus', words and actions are meant to draw these disciples into a deeper relationship with the Father and to exemplify what the Father is like. And what is the Father like? The Father is servant, is welcome, is teacher, is the victim, is the presider at all tables, is the resurrected one. As Jesus says to Philip, if you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father. Following this passage, Jesus promises to his followers that they will not be left orphaned, that the Spirit will come and remain with them. That even if the world will no longer see Jesus his followers will. Christ will remain a part of their everyday reality.

This is what is so powerful about the incarnation: that in abiding with humanity, God is with us in the present, that even though we gather in this place to worship, God is just as real in our own homes and work places, and anywhere we might go out there, as God is in here. What is more, is that God is within us, within our very humanity, carried in our hearts, the mark of the creator remaining on our souls. And it is in God through Christ that we awaken to this truth and come to make our home in the holy. We make our home in the holy.

Jesus has a multitude of I am sayings throughout John: I am the bread of life, I am the gate, I am the good shepherd, I am the true vine, I am the way, the truth and the life. For Christians salvation isn't simply hanging out with Jesus like we might with a friend having coffee: sitting together at a table, sharing the details of our lives, filling in the other on how things are going. No, ours is far more intimate. It is a life with Christ, that is lived like Christ, where we find God and our salvation. We abide within Christ, as we are the Body and Christ abides within us such that we eat the bread that is his body and drink the wine which is his blood. In our union our lived lives begin to sync up with the life Christ lived and together we reveal the Father to the world. And the life we live in Christ testifies to our faith through the fruit produced in that life. In

Christ God makes a home with humanity, and in return, we are invited to make a home in God. Now home can look like a lot of different things. What does home look like for you?

A couple of years ago I was on sabbatical and with family. We were at a lake in Wisconsin where we were able to kayak, fish, hike and swim. The kids were off fishing and my dad, sister and brother in law were off doing something else. Peter, my husband, didn't come on this trip. And I found myself having some alone time just swimming around in the water. The lake was one of those in the Midwest carved out by a glacier. And like much of the upper Midwest the soil in that area was sandy and so was the bottom of the lake. Under the water the lake reminded me of the lake of my childhood. Golden water with sun beams shining through to the bottom turning the sand gold as well. And I was taken back to the summers on the little lake in Michigan where my grandparents lived, where I and my siblings swam every day. And for a moment, under that water, my mom and my grandmother were still alive, up at the house making lunch for us kids...probably bologna sandwiches made with the most processed white bread you could find, served on paper plates with Lays potato chips and Vernors ginger ale to drink. And for a moment, in that golden light, under the water, I was home: a familiar, warm place and a moment filled with love. What does home look like for you? Whatever it is, God is there.

The late priest and theologian Henri Nouwen writes, "There are two realities to which you must cling. First, God has promised that you will receive the love you have been searching for. And second, God is faithful to that promise. So stop wandering around. Instead, come home and trust that God will bring you what you need....that God will give you that all-fulfilling love and will give it in a human way....Home is where you are truly safe...when you come home and stay home, you will find the love that will bring rest to your heart."¹

Home is in God both for us here in this life and for us in the next. And as Jesus makes clear in his actions and words to his disciples in our gospel today, God is continually making a home for us and inviting us in, a mother hen striving to gather her chicks under her wings, just as God is seeking to make a home in us, embodied as the Son of Man looking for a place to lay his head when even the foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests. When we make our home in God, we enter a place that can afford us spiritual rest, we step into a place of deep joy because it is familiar, and yet sacred all at the same time; it is being caught up in both fulfillment and longing. It is trust without the soulless rigidity of certainty; it is a thin space breaking open our own hearts which so often can put up walls to protect itself. Coming home in God can be like falling in love. Christ has prepared a place for you and all you need to do, is come in. Amen.

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love. A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*. Pg. 12.