

Many Dwelling Places

Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16

John 14: 1-14

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Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16

In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

John 14: 1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 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? 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.

And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” 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’? 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. 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.

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. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

In the summer of 2013 my siblings and I prepared to sell my Mom's house. It was the home I had lived in from second grade until I moved to Boston 14 years later. This had been the house where my Barbies and stuffed animals were replaced by Bobby Sherman and David Cassidy posters on my bedroom walls for a few years, the place where my Mom played her clarinet and knit hundreds of mittens, the place where my brothers and I played soccer, baseball, wiffleball, hockey and basketball, and the place where my sister and I fought over dolls, clothes, and just about everything else. It was the place where my Dad and I were often disappointed by the Red Sox, but kept on watching anyway. This was where our family of six shared everyday routines and troubles, family time and door slamming tantrums, celebrations and disappointments, homework and headaches, holiday joy and times of grief. It had been a place of rock and refuge, the assurance of welcome, a fortress in tough times. Like every other family,

our home was a collection of memories, stories, laughter, pain, faith, boredom, accomplishments, squabbles, graduations, first jobs, good times and inside jokes.

Every room, every corner, had a list of memories, although the details shifted in each of our retellings. And now, as a rite of passage, it was time to let it go. As we packed up and cleaned up, we shared memories, tears, highs and lows, and many awkward and embarrassing moments.

Surprisingly though, the part of getting the house ready to sell that became the hardest of all was when it was time to paint. Taking rollers and trays of neutral ivory paint over all the walls to give the future new owners a fresh clean slate was in fact erasing our presence. It was though we had never been there. As each wall changed color, it lost character, it lost 'us.' We no longer belonged there.

For years we had belonged to every bit of that 4-bedroom cape, but not any longer. Once our home became a series of white-walled rooms in an empty house, we no longer belonged there. What was great for the real estate market was difficult for us. Not belonging was an emotional challenge we were not ready for, so we found a way around that, and we knew that my Mom would have not only approved of it, she probably would have been the first one to think of the idea. We took a fine point permanent marker, found obscure places like the top rail of door, an underside corner of a closet shelf and the top of an exposed cellar beam to write our first names and our date of birth, and we added in the same for our parents. It's amazing how helpful and cathartic that little bit of graffiti was for us that day before we left the house for the last time. Short of any dramatic remodeling project, there will always be a part of each us that belongs, a part of each of us that will always dwell in our childhood home.

Poet David Whyte succinctly described what we felt that day, "There is no house like the house of belonging." It is indeed the deepest longing of human beings - the desire to belong to people and places and the many ways of experiencing a sense of home. When ivory paint erased our belonging of home, we realized more than ever that home is not about wood and plaster, paint and siding, but about *where* we belong, and *who* we belong to.

The idea of the ultimate belonging and of home, is what Jesus offers us, and has already prepared for us, as a dwelling place with him. I suspect that the different dwelling places in our lifetime might bear some clues, some hints, of what this prepared place will be, but it is really beyond our knowing, beyond our imagination. Lutheran pastor Janet Hunt reminds us that we do know that it is built and shaped by God's love, grace and mercy, and that its very existence is hope itself as we know that there is a home, an eternal belonging waiting for us. This home is a place of belonging, peace, and calm, as even before Jesus offers his promise of a dwelling place, he encourages us to not let our hearts be troubled. We belong to him, and to the place he has created for us.

And so I wonder these days when we are at home by necessity, how does this promised future shape your present life now? Even in the midst of a pandemic that has uprooted our lives, that has shut us out from the places and activities and events that have always given us a sense of belonging, and that has separated from many people that we belong with, how does Jesus' invitation to believe in God, to know that there is a place, a home, prepared for us with Jesus, a place that by faith we know the way to, guide us now?

To see the place prepared for us by Jesus not as a literal, physical home, but rather as an abiding, indwelling relationship with the One who is "the way, and the truth, and the life," is to be in the intimate Presence of God here and now. We recognize that God is already present in the

life and ministry of Jesus, and that by faith, God is also present in our lives. “If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Jesus’ words tell us that abiding with God did not start when he died, but rather it is a description of how he lived. This is true with us as well. Belonging to God, dwelling in Jesus, is not about where we live in the ‘afterlife,’ but where we live, where we dwell, where we belong, where we are home, in the present. This is our rock and our refuge, our fortress and our guide. Our times are in God’s hands, in God’s steadfast love, where we dwell secure and belong. Amen.