

Homecoming

Easter 6; John 14:23-29

Slide: Packwood Lake

I'm going to begin this sermon with a visualization exercise. I have only ever done this once before many years now, so no fears, this isn't a trend in preaching. It's just for today. Those who have done Centering Prayer or any other kind of contemplative spiritual practice with me knows that I don't expect that everyone be comfortable with this; it may be your thing, it might not. But, just for this moment, a brief time, let's enter into a space that's a little different, maybe even uncomfortable for some of you. So, sit in a comfortable position, particularly both feet on the floor, hands folded in your lap, and close your eyes if that's comfortable for you. I also have a lovely image you can look at instead if that is more comfortable for you.

Notice your breathing. Your body is breathing without you doing anything. You are breathing in and breathing out. You don't have to make yourself breathe or control anything. Just notice the fact that your body is breathing and it's wonderful that

it is. Give a moment of thanks for that and just notice that in this simple fact that your body is simply resting and breathing. You might notice that it's a cool sensation when breathing in and a warm sensation when breathing out. You might notice the belly rise, or the chest, or the back. Just breathing in this beautiful, sacred space and that's all.

Now imagine you are sitting in a place where you feel most at home, a place that immediately conjures up feelings of calm, peace, security, or comfort. It can be outside at your favorite lake. Maybe it is inside. Maybe it's here in this place. Maybe it's a special place you remember in childhood, even if it's been years since you were last there. What does it look like? Take a moment to go there. What does it feel like? What textures do you see? What smells do you smell? Do you taste anything? Really go to this place and be there for a moment, just breathing and sitting in this place that feels like home. (pause). Now, after one deep breath through the nose and out your mouth, open your eyes as we come together again into this space of worship.

Jesus said, ***“My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”***

Did you notice this phrase in today’s Gospel reading from John’s account? We will come to them. We will make our home with them. With you. With us.

This is a pivotal time in the life of Jesus and especially in the life of his disciples to whom he is speaking; to the women who supported him, likely present as well. This pivotal time in the Gospel of John is right before Jesus dies. Although we are indeed in the season of Easter, of Resurrection, our lectionary likes to take time in this season to leap backwards for a time to the weeks prior to his death.

In these chapters of John, Jesus is giving his last instructions and teachings to those he is about to leave behind for a time until the promised Advocate, the Holy Spirit, comes to dwell with them. These readings in the Easter season are supposed to help prepare for the Day of Pentecost, the day we celebrate the coming of the Advocate. This year, we celebrate that day on June 5th.

The anxiety in this reading for today is paramount in this pivotal time. With the time now short, Jesus gives them parting words. It reminds me always of when parents leave to go on that first date after their first baby, instructions upon instructions to the babysitter:

“Now, there are extra diapers in the cupboard upstairs. Don’t forget that she often gets fussy after meals. We are really close by. Don’t feel bad if you need us, you can just call us if you have any questions. We aren’t far away. Oh, and she may need a warm blanket today, it’s a bit chilly in the house. And, did I already say we are nearby if you need us?”

Jesus is about to depart and the disciples know something is going on. They know it. They don’t understand why Jesus must leave, but they have heard it more than once now. And, they are likely concerned. They are about to lose the home they know and are comfortable with. What will happen next?

Within this context, it’s interesting to me that Jesus doesn’t seem to want to be practical with his friends here.

He doesn't think it's important to explain to them how to create a church, what by-laws to use, how to increase charitable giving or what church is supposed to do to respond to a changing world. Really Jesus, it's a post COVID world, how do we get people to come to church again after this trauma, now, or even ever? That's the help we want, right?

Nope. Jesus is more interested in homecoming, how to tap into that home he promises he brings and will bring. If we live in this pivotal space, this homecoming Jesus promises, this immanent and confusing and difficult time the disciples are in, which more often than not is what we also live, than that's where Jesus would rather take us before leaving us alone. Because, he is leaving them alone for a time. He is preparing them for absence, his absence, for a time. And, here, knowing that they are anxious and bewildered, instead of preparing his own self for his death, he chooses rather to comfort them with promises of homecoming, of a home that he and the Father will bring.

Notice the language though! It's not home up there. It's not just the dwelling place he

speaks of in chapter 14, the many rooms the Father has prepared in eternal life, it's not just pie in the sky by and by, heaven is later, and heaven only an afterlife, there after death. Notice the language. He will bring home here. Now. This. Not only later. This home is one promised breath away. It's a home we can go to any time we choose to. It's with us. And, we can access this life giving, life transforming Spirit home whenever we wish. Of course, discerning what is the direction of Christ's Spirit for us and what our own desires are or what our own sinful wills are, takes a lot of home dwelling to discern, but the promise is still there.

For, with the physical leaving of Jesus comes his promised Advocate, the Spirit, sent by God in Jesus' name to be present with all his followers. Into this reality, this presence, the Advocate comes to be home with us. And, with this gift, we have a continued teacher and supporter, one who continues to teach us every day.

Having a teacher we can rely upon is a very powerful thing. Last week, we wished Julie Kitzman well on her journey in retirement. She has

been one of our preschool teachers here at St. John's Christian Preschool for almost 25 years and that teaching has made an impact. She cannot know to what extent that example will be for almost 400 of those young children she encountered along the way, but she most certainly did make an impact.

My Kindergarten teacher's name was Ms. Laramie. She was one of the most important people in my early years. Ms. Laramie was a teacher who loved her students. While correcting our cursive and reminding us of our need to share, to say please and thank you, and to get in a proper line holding hands to get somewhere, Ms. Laramie was also a gentle, kind, supportive and direct teacher. And, today, she has never stopped being that person.

About three years ago, Ms. Laramie found me on Facebook. She found me, not the other way around! And, she said she had been looking for all her students so that she could give pictures to us. They were pictures of me, or her and me, or of our class. And, in one of these pictures, I was sitting in her lap. My twin sister Carol was sitting next to her as

well, with her head leaning on Ms. Laramie's shoulder. Both of us could feel the support of this teacher, and it felt like home. Looking at that picture again, I was brought back to feeling 5 years old, feeling included, admired, and supported.

Now, clearly, Ms. Laramie or Mrs. Kitzman are NOT Jesus, nor would they want to be given that responsibility! But, we all need to know that there is someone in our corner, don't we? There is one to whom we may go, knowing that this world needs indwelling, a sense of home with the one who is the Way, Truth and Life.

This does not mean, however, that this home Jesus promises us is an escape from this world. It is not a denial of the troubles of this world or a release from working on the hard problems we wish would just go away. It does not excuse us as people of faith for not using our voices and our actions against:

- racial violence
- or the work of peacemaking in war
- Or the apathy against making direct and

- necessary changes in the crisis of Climate Change.
- Nor does it remove us from ignoring the plight of the poor, the ill, the refugee and the most in need, of continuing to respond to Covid 19 if the need should arise.

or exasperation, the Advocate, the Spirit of our Lord Jesus will not leave you alone. That home is simply one prayer away. May this be so in our lives.

Amen.

No. This gift of homecoming, this indwelling is alongside the hard work of being the people of God, a respite while responding to God's world. It is a promise that we are always one breath and prayer away from the friend who will never leave us while we do those tasks.

The great author C.S. Lewis once said: *"Life with God is not immunity from life's difficulties, but peace in difficulties."*

Life with God is not immunity from life's difficulties, but peace in difficulties. It is not a peace that the world gives. It is not a peace that is without conflict. It is a peace that only Christ provides among and within conflict, one that enables us to be the called people of God. Today, know that this promise is present for you. In your trials in life, and we all have them, through times of aloneness, grief