

If You Lived Here, You'd be Home by Now – John 14:1-14
Easter 5A in a Coronavirus World

This week, in a beautiful churchyard cemetery at Pleasant Valley Lutheran Church near Eleva, Wisconsin, I commended to Almighty God a dear saint we at St. John's knew as "Bud". Actually, his given name was LaVerne, but Bud was an endearing nickname he had his whole life.

With military honors and a few very special family members donning the necessary face masks and social distancing, Bud was laid to rest in a place he called home. This was the church where he grew up. It was where his parents are buried. It's where the farm he grew up on was. Although he lived a great deal of his life in Eau Claire, eventually, Bud knew that his home was more than a place – it was that familiar belonging, the belonging each of us all long for ourselves.

To each of us, home is something different. We have a lot of idioms about home or the sense of it – "There's no place like home", "Home is where the heart is", "Show me the way to go home", or "home is where you hang your hat". All these point to an experience, one that is relatable, one that brings consolation and comfort.

Jesus said, **"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? ³And 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 that I am going."**

What a beautiful promise of a place to call home. And, traditionally, we have had every reason to think that the place Jesus goes to prepare for us, that home, is always, always a heavenly one. Certainly, we may think it should be. After all, this most beloved part of

the Bible is read over and over again at funerals because we tend to connect to it in that way.

And, what Jesus says to his disciples here in John chapter fourteen IS indeed meant to quiet their troubled hearts, promising abundant accommodation, a dwelling with many rooms, one that always has space for another. And, in sharp contrast to the guesthouse at the birth of Jesus, where there was no room, our Lord promises that there will be room in his Father's house, always.

And yet, isn't there more to this promised home than an eternal promise, that is the life that is given *after* death? Are we perhaps too attuned to this passage of the Bible as solely promises of eternity and not about any present promise of the comfort of home in Jesus Christ? Is Jesus actually talking about something more than heaven, about more than the life after this one? Is Jesus also, if not more so, referring to that

place he prepares for us here in this life? Could Jesus really be referring to the home he gives us with that gift of his Holy Spirit, one whose dwelling place is within each of us? This is what I wonder today in this strange Coronavirus world.

"And, you know the place where I am going," says Jesus. We do? Good old practical Thomas responds in what seems like incredulousness, "we do? How can we?! Jesus, we do not know the way to where you are going? Do you have Google map directions to get to the Father's dwelling place you speak of?" Jesus replies to him especially saying you already have the map to get there. It's me. I am the map. Just open the map and you are there.

In his bestselling book, "Wherever you go, there you are," Jon Kabat-Zinn says the following about our experience as it happens to us in the present moment:

“Wherever you go, there you are. Whatever you wind up doing, that’s what you wound up doing. Whatever you are thinking of right now, that is what you are thinking. Whatever has happened to you has already happened. The important question is, “how are you going to handle it”?

Well, how are we going to handle it? How are we going to handle our experience now, not only at the time of eternity? How we to live a life now faithfully, even and especially as the world needs us to be as the faithful? Like the disciples before us, we wish that things could just stay comfortable or give us certainty for our future. We ruminate over things that have happened in the past and worry about things that have not yet happened.

Will the church ever be like it was? Will I get the coronavirus? Is this isolation really going to go on for a year or more? Can’t we just move on and get back to some

normalcy whatever that is supposed to be? We do not know where you are Jesus, how can we know the way? We cannot even find our own way?

But, the truth of some of these most beautiful words Jesus gives to his disciples to comfort them is this: this dwelling place is not only a future one, pie in the sky by and by, sometime when we do enter into eternal life, sometime later than now. It is also a present reality. It is a promise of comfort, of holy indwelling for us now. Imagine that as we at this time of strife just like the disciples, who were befuddled and dismayed that Jesus should leave them, we just want to know what’s happening! How are you going to make all this right, Lord?

Siblings in Christ, we must be wary to wish for things to be what they were before as they won’t be, not fully. The world has changed into something new, and along with the suffering, good will come out of it, too. And, we also

must be wary to be fearful of the future. Christ will transform us to be the church we need to be. So, before we get lost, looking for a home that is really right in front of us, let us open the Map of Jesus and remind us of these facts of our faith:

- That Jesus tells us in scripture his Kingdom of Heaven is near, not far away
- That accessing the Holy spirit of Christ is not a destination, it's a transformation
- That home is not something you go to, it's here already within you and in the person of Jesus Christ – the gift of his precious spirit is there. Now.
- And that no matter what is ahead, Christ has promised to be with us to the end of the age.

Eric Milner-White, an Episcopalian priest, military chaplain, and academic, served at King's College in the early 1920's. The First World War

had ended, but the upheaval from that tragic time in our world was ever present still. As part of a desire to bring some unity to the world, he began a new liturgy called the Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College Cambridge. Today many churches across the world celebrate Christmas this way, with a lessons and carols service on Christmas Eve.

What is less known is that Milner-White also wrote a prayer that is often called the Prayer for Courage. This prayer is found in just about every hymnal there is today. Ever since the pandemic began, the people of St. John's have been praying this prayer at every service:

“O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us;

**through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.”**

There is a trust in this prayer that this priest and military chaplain understood. He could not know the way, but he trusted that God would lead him through it. Dear friends, we do not know the way, as Thomas exclaimed to our Lord before his death. We cannot know the ending that is before us. But, we do know that Christ’s hand leads us. That present reality means that home is not only something in the future given to us. It is also here, that home is here, and you can access that home any time by leaning into the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

For in his house there are many dwelling places, and there is plenty of room to go around.
Amen.