

Peterkin Conference Center
Romney, WV

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John 14:1-14 In my Father's house are many mansions.
I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

(May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.)

When our rector first asked me to give a sermon, she gave me a choice of several possibilities, but this one passage sent a whirlwind of ideas through my mind. I didn't have a clue which one of these ideas to follow, so (as I often do when looking for inspiration) I let the Bible fall open at random. It showed me Psalms 45 and 46:

*"Listen, daughter, pay careful attention."
"God is...our citadel."*

Citadel...a house surrounding a town...
Or,

"In my Father's house are many mansions."

OK, that seems pretty clear; the topic for today's sermon will be *houses*.
But first...

Did you know that this one passage has probably caused more comfort and assurance...and more pain and heartache than any other that I can think of?

The comfort and assurance part is obvious to most of us. It's probably the most often requested passage at funerals, perhaps because it relays the message that someone is going to take care of us.

But, the pain and heartache? The perceived exclusiveness of our religion? This was illustrated this past week when a young married woman came into my office. As often happens, we talked about God.

She's a Christian, and her husband comes from a Baptist minister's family. Of the six children in her husband's family, three have embraced God and

three have rejected the whole idea. I'm told that this 50-50 split is fairly common in ministers' families.

The Dilemma? Since

"No one can come to the father except through [Jesus],"

She was afraid that her husband (one of the "rejecters") wouldn't go to heaven.

It is my belief that dilemmas often happen when you take any one passage in the Bible and look at it in only one way...particularly (and this is a personal opinion) if that one was is the literal interpretation (perhaps because the more we think we know about this world, the less we're willing to take on faith).

The first part of the reading is a good example. In another translation, it says that

"There are many rooms in my Father's house...I am going now to prepare a place for you."

As many of you know, my husband and I have been dealing with the renovation of a REAL HOUSE for about four months. The place is in a state of total chaos.

We've had the floors sanded and refinished,
all new molding put in,
and a stairway moved.
We've gouged out cracks,
spackled,
sanded,
sealed, and
painted walls.

We've shifted furniture around until we couldn't lift another thing...and we are both very, very tired.

So...one of the first thoughts that came to mind with regard to this passage was really quite straight forward:

If it took this much work to fix one house...
and Jesus had to fix up a place for each and everyone of us...

then, the concept of heaven isn't all that it's cracked up to be!
(I mean, I thought I was going to get some rest when I leave this world!)

A dilemma.

Obviously, I wasn't thinking about this passage in the right way. So, I began to think of it on a more spiritual level. I considered our bodies as HOUSES FOR OUR SOULS.

Now, this had possibilities.

The "souls" of our spiritual feet (so to speak), moving along a foundation (or floor, if you will) of information composed of everything we've ever seen, heard, or thought...

sometimes (these "souls"), running into walls of limitations, walls that keep us from straying too far afield and giving us a warm, comfortable sense of security...

sometimes climbing staircases that take us to "the depth and breadth and height [our] soul[s] can reach, when feeling out of sight for the ends of Being and ideal Grace." (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets From the Portuguese*).

Well, you probably get the picture.

In fact, this particular way of thinking about houses is not as far-fetched as it might seem. After all,

"it's what's inside that counts."

And it explains something that I never could quite understand about the resurrection story: Here were a bunch of people who had traveled around with this man Jesus for three years (give or take)...and yet after only three days, they couldn't recognize him! Seemed kinda strange to me. And yet, it would make sense if they had been staring at his "house" all those years, rather than his soul.

No wonder they couldn't understand what God looked like. Jesus kept saying

"He looks just like me!"

and all those years, they kept staring at outward appearances...

Hmmm.

Well, we've looked at this passage in terms of a real house and a spiritual house; but my husband, who is a dyed-in-the-wool Episcopalian since birth, says that a good sermon must always examine a Biblical passage in three different ways. (It's part of the rules.)

And last Wednesday, I didn't have any ideas.

But, as I was going to work on Thursday morning, I suddenly realized that I hadn't asked GOD what He wanted to tell his children (one should always check with the Guy in charge, ya know) and, suddenly, the concept of a HOUSE AS FAMILY came into my head. It seemed a bit fluky; however, when I got to work, I looked up *house* in the dictionary...and there it was!

"A group of individuals who were all related, as in the House of Tudor"...

If we consider this kind of interpretation, we begin to glimpse the inclusive nature of God.

"There are many families in my Father's family."

And it's this kind of thinking that can give hope to that young woman who visited me. Basically, there's room for everyone in my Father's House. (That's why He's given us so much time...so that none shall be lost.)

God decides what is right and acceptable to Him.

"I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Did you know that "I am" is God's name?

"GOD, the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Peter learned this lesson when he was asked to visit the centurion Cornelius in Caesarea. It was forbidden for a Jew to mix with people of

another race and visit them. They were considered "not good enough." But God had made it clear to Peter that he must not call anyone profane or unclean.

The "Way" to God is through your "way of living." And each way of living is unique. There are as many of them as there are people...and interpretations of this passage.

But the bottom line is this:

If you try your best to do what is right,
then there will come a time when you will pass
through all that Jesus passed through in His life,
thereby entering "through him" into eternal life.

You will be tempted and not succumb. And you will be taught by God. You will be given a new name...

And your own uniqueness will add something to the initial pattern that Jesus laid down. Therefore,

*"He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also;
and greater works than these."*

May your works be as beautiful in His sight as your souls ALREADY are...in Him.

Amen.