

Fifth Sunday of Easter (A/RCL)  
John 14.1-14  
April 20, 2008  
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

If you could travel through space and time and return to one of the most peaceful, loving, cozy, special, safe places you've ever been, where would it be?

I think of a couple places. One is the attic room under the eaves of my grandmother's home in Yonkers. I knew it had once been my great-grandmother's bedroom; I'd never met her, so that fascinated me. I loved the cut-outs in the wall and ceiling made by the eaves. The rooms in my childhood home were painted, so the fact that this one had floral wallpaper made it exotic to me. It was very homey, warm and soft and comfy, like my Grandma Flossie Horton herself. It had upholstered easy chairs that my sisters and I could sink into with a good book. That little room under the eaves of #107 Hillcrest Avenue, a beautiful green and beige wainscoted house, was far removed from all the dangers in the world. I was always a visitor, never a resident in that room, but because I was family, I knew it was "home" and I knew I was welcomed there. Is there a safe, cozy, wonderfully welcoming place like that in **your** life or memory?

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us He's going ahead to lay out the welcome mat. There's a wonderful homecoming that awaits each of us, in that place we've never been.... This Gospel is **very** familiar to me because it's the Scripture I've proclaimed at many gravesides. I do love it, and so does the larger church. It's suggested for funerals and interments because of the obvious comfort it holds for those who mourn – the good news that Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for us, so that where He is, we may be also. It reminds us that our loved ones don't disappear into a cosmic black hole when they die. They step across the threshold of death into our Father's house, and are welcomed by One who loves them well.

I have a daily prayer book which includes morning prayer and a snatch of Psalm 27:

One thing I have asked of the Lord,

this is what I seek:  
 that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
 all the days of my life;  
 to behold the beauty of the Lord  
 and to seek him in his temple.  
 Psalm 27.4

“That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life....” I’m blessed to work inside **this** house of the Lord much of the time, and to have it as my “base of operations” all of the time. I’m blessed that my work place includes this sanctuary, so I can pop in whenever I choose for a quick prayer of thanks or plea for wisdom or request for a favor. Dwelling in the house of the Lord **now** is a great way to get ready for dwelling in the Father’s house **later** ☺. I don’t think that really means hanging out in this sanctuary day in and day out, though.

In St. John’s Gospel, Jesus loves the word “dwell”, which can also be translated “remain in” or “abide.” “Dwell, remain, abide in me,” He says....

“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15.4-5

Dwelling, remaining, abiding in the house of the Lord **now**, means living in the Lord’s presence as fully as we can **today**, walking in the light of His love and truth, following the Way He sets before us, the Way He sets before Dean and Lexi and Victoria, this weekend of their baptism.

Today Jesus says loud and clear,

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.” John 14.6

There is nothing God wants more for us than to occupy the same spiritual space as God. God wants to set up housekeeping with us **now**, not just later. Dwelling in the house of the Lord now is the best way to get ready for dwelling in the Father’s house later ☺.

Remember the heart of it all: dwelling in “the house of the Lord,” “the Father’s house” has to do with relationship, not real estate. It’s not about where we live, it’s about Whom we live

with. At the end of the day, whom have we served? Whom have we loved? In what have we invested our time? For whom or for what have we been willing to put ourselves on the back burner? Whose guidance have we sought when faced with tough decisions? Whose opinion has shaped our actions? Have we been dwelling in the house of the Lord or elsewhere?

The cozy little wallpapered bedroom under the eaves in my Grandma's house would have been precious to me even without the eye appeal and creature comforts it held. It was special and it was safe because I knew I was loved there. I wasn't loved by four walls but by the people who lived there. It wasn't a matter of real estate, but of relationship....

I know a woman whose living, loving relationship with God compels her to care for God's children, especially God's homeless children. She volunteers with the Interfaith Hospitality Network, which invites congregations to offer their buildings as shelter for homeless families. She recently wrote:

I have been periodically making dinners, hosting IHN guests, wrapping Christmas presents and spending nights sleeping in the basement of my congregation's rectory... for ten-plus years now... my up-close, personal way of directly helping the homeless, working poor in my community.

I have had the incredible opportunity to meet, greet and converse with many bright, delightful, upbeat guests of IHN... lab technicians, store clerks, patient care assistants, moms, dads, grandmas and exuberant and very well-behaved kids. What a blessing the guests have been in my life! My own issues certainly come into correct perspective through my encounters with the guests. I spend only one or two restless, sleep-deprived nights on a lumpy cot in a somewhat damp basement. I get to leave at 7 a.m., go HOME, take my shower and go to work. The guests are sleeping on these cots for weeks, sometimes months. They rise between 4:30 a.m. and 6:30 a.m., taking their sleepy, quiet, non-crying children off to the day center (aptly named The House of Hope) where they all get showered, dressed and off to school, work, job-hunting, house-hunting.

I realize our guests are too tired at the end of their long days to write letters, send out e-mails or make calls to their elected officials.... They don't have the energy left to speak up for those things all Americans should have – affordable housing, sufficient healthcare and equal educational opportunities.

Some of you may....

This sister in the faith dwells in the house of the Lord **today**, sometimes by sleeping on a cot in a damp basement and sometimes by performing her paying job and sometimes by being a vocal advocate for the poor and homeless. In baptism we are called to do the same, to be in a life-giving, life-changing relationship with our Lord, to make a home for others in this life and to be welcomed into the Father's house in the time to come. It's about relationship, not real estate.

Remember that line from Robert Frost's poem, "The Death of the Hired Man"?

"Home is where, when you have to go there,/ They have to take you in."  
"I should have called it/ Something you somehow haven't to deserve."

We **don't** deserve it and God **doesn't** "have to" let us into the Father's house someday, but God wants to, with all God's heart. We don't "have to" dwell in the Lord's house now, but God wants us to, with all God's heart. Choose to be at home in God's presence today. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham