

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 8, 2016

John 14:1-14

"At Home in God"

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

What do you think heaven'll be like? Do you ever find yourself wondering?

When I was a kid, I **must have seen too many cartoons that depicted heaven as a place where we just sort of sit around all day on clouds, playing harps.** Frankly, it **didn't sound all that attractive** to me. In fact, it **sounded boring**, and I wasn't so sure I wanted to go!

Since then, I've discovered **several scripture passages that make me much more excited about eternal life.** Passages like Isaiah 25, that speak of a heavenly banquet.

"Here on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the Lord of Hosts will spread a wondrous feast for everyone around the world -- a delicious feast of good food, with clear, well-aged wine and choice beef. At that time ... he will swallow up death forever. The Lord God will wipe away all tears..."

I LIKE TO EAT. Many of my **best memories** are of **large family get-togethers where we would all sit down to a Thanksgiving or Christmas feast.** So heaven as a feast **sounds just great to me!**

The **Bible doesn't** tell us in **great detail** what eternal life will be like. **Instead, it paints word pictures to evoke the joy, the peace, and the wonder** that living in the presence of God will be like.

In today's passage, when Jesus says *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me,"* **the phrase could be translated as "Trust in God. Trust also in me."**

Jesus is telling us **not to worry about eternal life.** He's **telling us to just trust him.** After all, he knows us better than anyone else, so we can **be sure that the place he prepares for us will be perfect.**

Far too often, **Christians get stuck in a kind of geographical mindset** when we think about heaven. And so we ask, *"where am I going when I die?"*

But a more appropriate way to phrase the question would be: **"To whom am I going?"**

In his book, *Homing in the Presence*, poet theologian Gerhard Frost tells this story:

*One day as I walked up the airport ramp to board a plane, a family of four was in front of me. The older child appeared to be about four. She **radiated expectancy and joy.** Her Father looked down at her and asked, 'where are we going?' **'To Grandma's!'** she shouted, punctuating her words with a higher bounce.*

*She **didn't say, 'to Bismarck' or 'to Minneapolis,' but 'to Grandma's.'** As far as she was concerned, she was going to a person – the place didn't matter.*

*She was an eloquent witness," says Frost, "to the fact the **we home in those who love us, in people more than places."***

It's the same when it comes to our eternal destination. We don't need to know the details. It's enough to know: **"We're going to our Father's! ... We're going to God's."**

As Jesus says, *"Trust in God - trust also in me."* We can be assured that as long as we're **going to God's** when we die, we **don't need to worry about a thing**.

Jesus' words here can give great comfort to us as we think about eternal life. And that's certainly a **central message** of this passage.

But **what if I were to tell you** that the **text isn't only about life after death?** What if I told you that **Jesus' words have meaning not just for the hereafter, but also for the here and now?**

If we look at the context of Jesus' words, he is trying to reassure his disciples in the face of his impending death. When he says he is *"going away,"* he **isn't speaking of a geographical journey up to heaven.** Rather, he's **talking about his own death.**

And when he speaks of preparing a place for his disciples, he's **not just talking about the hereafter.**

He's talking about a **place for them within the community of faith called the family of God.**

We shouldn't take Jesus' words too geographically. What Jesus is promising is that, *"Where He is, we will be also."*

The phrase *"my father's house"* could be translated as, *"My Father's household or family."* In other words, **where Jesus is – in the family of God – we will be also.**

Not just at death, but **right here and now OUR HOME IS WITH GOD AND ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.**

If you read the entire gospel of John, this interpretation makes sense. In John's gospel, **far more important than going "up" to heaven is the in-ness and one-ness Jesus wants us to experience with God.**

It's the **same in-ness and one-ness that Jesus has with the Father, and he wants us to have it in our earthly life now.**

In John 17 Jesus **prays for** his disciples and for those who will believe because of their witness:

"As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us," he prays. *"... so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me."*

Jesus and God are **not up in heaven**, waiting until the end times to **come back to earth and take us away to heaven in some scary Rapture while our friends who are less holy have to live through seven years of tribulation on earth.**

That's **not** the Biblical witness.

No. God dwells with us and in us now, on earth, in mystical communion through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This way of looking at Jesus' words can help them have meaning for us **not only in the hereafter, but also in the here and now.**

Of course, it's very comforting to know that some day, after we die, we will be with God in an existence where there is no more pain or sorrow, and where God himself will wipe away all tears.

It's comforting to know that someday, we'll join our loved ones who have died in the faith at the heavenly banquet table of the Lord.

But it's **also very comforting – right here, right now** – to know that Jesus has prepared a place **WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD** – the community of faith for me. And that means that **during my time on earth – I can truly “home in the presence of God's amazing love and grace”**, to use Frost's expression.

DO YOU FEEL AT HOME IN GOD?

Do you **know that Jesus has prepared a special place for you in God's loving presence where you can live** – not just after you die, but **every day of your life?**

And **you can be certain – beyond any doubt** – that, when you do die, you will **experience the resurrection won for us on the cross and proclaimed by the empty tomb of Christ?** **This promise was given you in baptism.**

We **don't know exactly what the resurrection life will be like, anymore than I did as a child.** But that's okay.

We don't need to know.

We simply know that WE WILL GO TO GOD'S.

And THAT'S ENOUGH. We are **already at home in God**. After death, this reality will be perfectly fulfilled.

In the meantime, I want to **savor the present truth that I am at home in God, my loving father, don't you?**

There are so many things that can **make us feel like strangers, aliens in our own land.**

There are **so many ways we can feel lost, alone, abandoned.**

But we have Jesus' promise that he will abide in us and we will abide in him, so that *“where he is, there we may be also.”* We **don't ever need to feel alone, or lost.**

Every Sunday, through the familiar words of the liturgy, and the music of our worship; through the familiar faces we see gathered here around word and sacrament; through all of these, we are reminded that **we are home with the Father, here and now.**

Gerhard Frost tells a wonderful **story about knowing we're at home with God.**

There was once a powerful man, important in the world of business. He was accustomed to being in charge, having his own way. One day, late for an appointment, he decided to take a shortcut. To his dismay, he soon found that he'd chosen the wrong road.

He realized he was completely lost, and decided to ask the first person he saw for directions.

That person was a child, playing in his driveway. The businessman asked him gruffly, "Boy, which way to Dover?" "I don't know," the child responded, embarrassed.

"Well then," the man demanded, "how far to Paynesville?" "I don't know that either," the child answered.

*The man's questions got angrier as the boy kept responding with the same answer until, finally, the man lost his temper and shouted, "**You don't know much, do you?**"*

*Then, **for the first time, the boy smiled.** Looking up the winding driveway to a little house where the evening light shone through the window, the boy exclaimed, "**No. But I ain't lost.**"*

You and I may not know much.

We **may not have all the answers.**

We **may not be powerful or wise** in the eyes of the world.

But as long as we continue to find our home in the presence of our loving God, **AT LEAST WE AIN'T LOST.**

Because, WE'RE ALREADY HOME! Amen.