

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter May 18, 2014. John 14: 1-14 Amy Donohue-Adams

Blessed be God!!

John Todd was born in Rutledge, Vermont into a family of several children. They later moved to the village of Kensington back in the early 1800's. And there, at a very early age, John had both his mother and father die, and he was left without parents. The relatives wondered what they would do with the number of children, how they would parcel them out to friends and relatives. One dear and loving aunt said she would take little John. The aunt sent a horse and a slave to get John who was only six at the time. The slave named Caesar came and put little Johnnie on the back of the horse. On the way back, an endearing conversation takes place:

John: 'Will she be there?

Caesar: Oh, yes, she'll be there waiting for you.

John: Will I like living with her?

Caesar: My son, you fall into very good hands.

John: Will she love me?

Caesar: Ah, she has a big heart.

John: Will I have my own room? Will she let me have a puppy?

Caesar: She's got everything all set, son. I think she has some surprises too, John.

John: Do you think she'll go to bed before we get there?

Caesar: Oh, no! She'll be sure to wait up for you. You'll see when we get out of these woods. You'll see her candle shining in the window."

When they got to the clearing, sure enough, there she was standing in the doorway with a candle in the window. She reached down, kissed him and said, "Welcome home!" She fed him supper, took him to his room, and waited until he fell asleep.

My sisters and brothers, my dear, dear friends, your room is ready! In today's gospel, Jesus promises to prepare a place for us in God's house. A "place" where we can be related to and remain with the Father as closely as Jesus, the Son, does. In other words, God has interior designs on us! We each have a place in the heart of God. A spot. Made ready just for us! I'm invited in. You're invited in. We are all invited in and expected! Long ago and for reasons known only to God, I put two messages at the bottom of all my computer e-mails. The first reads, "Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken." The second reads, "Never love anybody who treats you like you're ordinary." Many have commented on these quotes attributed to the unexpected and unconventional theologian, Oscar Wilde! But what is more important is that, somehow, somewhere, and at some point these important words became etched on my heart. "Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken." And "Never love anybody who treats you like you're ordinary." These words are at the very heart of our scripture today. We each have a special and unique self, and we each are in no way ordinary! God has interior designs on us. The very extraordinary heart of God is available and present to each and every one of us! Jesus invites us to a "place" where we can be related to and remain with the Father as closely as Jesus, the Son, does.

God's intimate and personal relationship was often lost on the original disciples. For instance, this morning, the disciples could only hear Jesus say, "I must go". They immediately felt the

glory days were over! The best of times were gone. What they didn't seem to hear, was the rest of the sentence. "I am going away to prepare a place for you, for each and every one of you. And after I have prepared a place for you, I will come back, and take your hand, and take you there." In the spirit of Oscar Wilde, Jesus might well have said, "I believe my Father's heart has long since had a hole in it, the EXACT size and shape of YOU, and it will take YOU, and only YOU, to fill that gap, for NO ONE else can be YOU for me or my Father"!

Jesus was giving the disciples a glimpse of the future. "When your time is over," Jesus says, "it is really just beginning, because I am going to come and get you and take you by the hand and bring you home, to our home, to God's house. We have interior designs on you!" This morning's message from John 14 is a very common Gospel used at funerals. I hear many beginning to say, "we have had far too many funerals here lately!" Over the past many months in this church, we have buried some of our great Saints: Pete, Fr. Bill, Judy, Louise, T.K. Barbara Moss, and just yesterday, Bill Cornell. These are our "not so ordinary" saints of God! They are real personalities! God had interior designs on them. The very extraordinary heart of God was available and present to each and every one of them! Most recently Barbara Moss taught me something special about God. Now trust me on this one – Barbara Moss was a woman who knew how to be Barbara Moss! She knew everyone else was taken and, by Gump, that made her Barbara Moss! I even have a serious hunch that Barbara never loved anyone who treated her like she was ordinary! Intuitively, Barbara knew that God had interior designs on her and she found a treasured relationship and "place" with God, just like the gospel says!

Barbara was so delighted to be an Episcopalian! She said to me that when she came to the Episcopal Church, she found a "happy God" and she was quick to follow that revelation with: "and I was totally unprepared for that experience!" She had found a "happy God" and she was totally unprepared for that! It took Barbara many long years to prepare herself for her "happy God", 85 to be exact, and she did, only to find that her "happy God" was preparing and welcoming her, holding her hand all along the way!! Barbara responded joyfully and quickly to her promised home and her on-going future with God. And Barbara found the porch light on in her own special place, her spot in God's home – a very warm "Welcome home, Barbara"! Welcome home to a place where you can be related to and remain with the Father as closely as Jesus, the Son, does!

Three and a half years ago, on our way to Langley Washington, Bill and I like to say we traveled with Marriott! Marriott properties were our "Rewards" along our unfamiliar roads across country and up the western coast. Each time we booked a place, a special room – an e-mail immediately followed. "Your time with us begins soon! We are excited you will be staying with us. We are preparing a room for you and are already getting ready for your arrival". This has a familiar ring to this morning's gospel, doesn't it? And such a comfort Bill and I felt about our immediate future as these e-mails continued to appear in our mailbox and we came closer and closer to our chosen, new island home! As we boarded the ferry at Mukilteo, our thoughts moved to wondering if those here on Whidbey Island would have room enough in their hearts for a couple of weary "Texans"—would there be place enough and open spaces enough or new and future relationships. And sure enough when we came through the church doors, welcome tags were waiting, Jack Wood's warmest smile and handshake was extended, and the inclusive circle

of this loving community widened to include us in your ready embrace. You see God has interior designs on all of us! Again and again, God gives us countless opportunities to make a “special place” for others, for one another, for the stranger who comes looking to be themselves or to find themselves, for the ones who are alone and lonely, the lost ones needing to be taken in, those eager to be included, those searching for that life giving, extraordinary feeling of not being treated like they are “ordinary”. God gives us countless opportunities to be the burning candle in the window, to wait for and welcome one another home! God continually lights the way, giving us everyday glimpses of the future interior designs already in place for all of us! God is always preparing a place for us! Hand in hand, God accompanies us home.

So what’s the rest of the story about John Todd and his dear and loving aunt. . . well, of course, John grew up to be a great minister of the Gospel. But it was there at his aunt’s home, with her as his new mother, that he grew up. It was always a place of enchantment because of his aunt; it awed him that such a place of replenishment and refreshment existed. She had given him a second home. She had become a second mother to him. Years later, long after he had moved away, his aunt wrote to say her own death was near. Her health was failing and she wondered what was to become of her. This is what John Todd wrote to her:

*“My Dear Auntie, years ago I left a house of death not knowing where I was to go, whether anyone cared, whether it was the end for me. The ride was long but Caesar encouraged me. Finally, he pointed out your candle to me and there we were in the yard, and there you stood. You embraced me and took me by the hand into my own room – the one that you had made up for me. After all these years I can’t believe it, how you did all that for me; I was expected; I felt safe in that room, so welcomed. It was my room! Now it’s your turn to go, Auntie, and as one who has tried it out, I’m writing to let you know, someone is waiting up for you, your room is all ready, the light is on, the door is open, and as you ride into the yard – don’t worry, Auntie. You are expected! I know for I once saw God standing in your doorway – long ago!”*

In our passage from John, Jesus tells the disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you, so that where I am, you may be also.” As a child John Todd found this to be true through the love of his Aunt. And in her old age, his Aunt found it to be true as well.

My brothers and sisters, my dear, dear friends, your room is already ready! Remember the words of Jesus, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me.” My Father’s heart has long since had a hole in it, the EXACT size and shape of YOU, and it will take YOU and only YOU, to fill that gap, for NO ONE else can be YOU for me or my Father! Come to the “place” specially prepared for you. So that where I am, there you may also be. My Father and I give you countless opportunities to live into our love and to make room for each other. You have everything you need for the journey. And we even light the way! We are always preparing a place for you! Be the candle in the doorway, the open and available hand of generosity, and the expectant and extraordinary heart of welcome, for ultimately, we are all just walking each other home! Blessed be God!