

SERMON MAY 5, 2013

[Acts 16:9-15; Psa. 67; Rev. 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29]

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PRAYER: Send out your light and your truth, O Lord; let them lead us; let them bring us to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: I want to sing a verse of song for you. If you know it, you are welcome to sing along with me.

This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through,
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

O Lord, you know I have no friend but you.
If heaven's not my home, my Lord, what will I do?
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door.
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

I sang this song often as a boy growing up in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. And I sang it fervently, as did my friends. We believed our **true home** was in heaven and any home here on earth was a *temporary* dwelling place.

Perhaps you have already guessed why this Gospel song came to mind this week as I pondered the Scripture lessons for today. Obviously, it was evoked by the reading from Revelation, which describes our ultimate heavenly home. But it was also evoked by the Gospel lesson, where John describes a very **different** kind of home, a home in **this world**, a home that is **permanent**, and a home **unique** to John's understanding in all of Scripture, a home where God the Father and Jesus have taken up **permanent** residence. Did you notice that during the Gospel reading? Look at verse 23: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father and I will love them, and *we will come to them and make our home with them.*" Actually, the pronoun translated "those who" and "them", here, is singular in Greek, so Jesus promises that he and the Father will make their home in *each individual* believer. I want to focus our attention this morning on this astonishing promise!

Now, we have a problem here, right at the beginning. Our Gospel lesson actually *combines* two paragraphs from Jesus' farewell to his disciples, but it also *leaves out* parts of both paragraphs! The first paragraph deals with Judas'

question to Jesus; the second paragraph describes Jesus' farewell gift of peace to the disciples. I will save preaching on peace for another time, for I want to focus on Jesus' answer to Judas.

But there's still a problem: we have Jesus' *answer* in our Gospel reading, but what is Judas' *question*? (By the way, we do not know for sure which Judas this is, except we know he is *not* Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus.) The question of Judas is found in the immediately preceding verse, which is not in our printed lesson. So, you should find in your order of worship a slip of paper with the whole paragraph (verses 18-24) that narrates both the question and the answer. Look at verse 22 where you will find Judas' question: "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" Just before this, in verse 21, Jesus said to his disciples, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and *I will love them and reveal myself to them.*" So, Judas asks, "Why will you reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"

Judas has *misunderstood* what Jesus was saying. Jesus has been speaking of an **inward** manifestation of love; Judas, on the other hand, is asking about the **outward** manifestation of love to the world. In fact, Judas may echo the objection raised by contemporary Jews who rejected the Johannine Christian witness. They complained that Jesus appeared **only** to his own, believing followers and **not** to his unbelieving enemies. Wouldn't it be more effective if the resurrected Jesus would suddenly appear before Pilate? Or the High Priest Caiaphas? Or the Jewish Sanhedrin? Well, the short answer is that only the **eyes of faith** can see more and more deeply what Jesus has to reveal. The believers are able to see because they *love Jesus* and *obey his command* to love each other. Sounds Benedictine to me! And because they love Jesus and keep his commands, something more is in store for them: the indwelling of Jesus and the Father in each one of them.

You may be wondering why Jesus puts such heavy emphasis here on this future revelation of himself and on his coming with the Father to dwell in the disciples. You probably know that our Gospel lesson is part of the Farewell Discourses of Jesus. He has been with them for perhaps three years, but now

he is leaving them to return to the Father. Not surprisingly, the disciples are upset by this news. So Jesus is careful to reassure them in various ways throughout his farewell words to them.

For example, the chapter that contains our Gospel lesson begins with the familiar words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. 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? And 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.” (14:1-3) In other words, during his absence, Jesus still has the disciples in mind: he is preparing dwelling places for them so they can be with him. In verse 18 of this chapter, Jesus says, “I will not leave you orphans; *I am coming to you*.” It may **appear** that Jesus’ departure will make them orphans and leave them desolate; but in reality they will soon experience a new community with Jesus that is deeper and closer than in the past—a community that includes the Father making his home in them.

Now, verse 23 is the climax of Jesus’ reassurance: “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our dwelling place with them.” The reassurance at the beginning of Chapter 14, which promised *many dwelling places* in the Father’s house, is now fulfilled, but in a slightly different way: it is not that the disciples will go to some dwelling place to be with Jesus and the Father, but that Jesus and the Father will come to them to make their dwelling place *in each disciple*. Do you see the paradox here? “Many dwelling places” because the Father and the Son are making their dwelling place in each of the disciples. The word translated “dwelling place” is the same in both places in this chapter!

We might put this another way: when Jesus and the Father make home in each disciple, each disciple will *share* in the community of life and love that is already shared by the Father and the Son. This is a living community grounded in love. This is a community that reveals itself in love. This is a community in which love reveals itself in keeping the *new commandment* Jesus gave his disciples: “That you love one another just as I have loved you.”

Now, it is not news that God will one day come to dwell among God's people. Israel was expecting this; but they expected the fulfillment to take place in the temple at the end of time. In fact, our reading from Revelation seems to allude to this expectation. (21:22ff.)

But, according to the promise of Jesus in our Gospel lesson, God's return to dwell among God's people is not an event still in the *future*, nor at the end of time; God's indwelling takes place *within history*. This indwelling does not take place in the temple, but in each one who loves Jesus and keeps his word. As one commentator put it, "The disciples are now 'where Jesus is', in the sphere of God's love." And, here we carefully, the indwelling of the Father and Jesus continues through all the future until the believers reach those dwelling places Jesus is leaving to prepare for them.

This new community formed by the indwelling of the Father and the Son in the believer is a community of love: love between the Father and the Son; the love of Jesus for each of his disciples; the love of the Father for every faithful believer; and every believer showing love to each other. "As the Father has loved me," says Jesus, "so I have loved you and so you ought to love one another."

If we ask, how can this happen—how can Jesus and the Father make their dwelling place—their home—in each believing person, the answer must be, through the Holy Spirit given to each one. Earlier in chapter 14, Jesus said to the disciples, "You know the Spirit of Truth because the Spirit of Truth abides with you, and will be in you." (v. 17)

So what does all this mean for us who are gathered here this morning to hear a word from God? Perhaps I may suggest a couple of things that occur to me. First, if you take nothing else away from this sermon, I hope you will meditate deeply on the profound truth that, as one who loves Jesus and keep his word, you, too, have become part of the community of love shared by the Father and Jesus! Just think of that! You now share in the life of love that is the very life of the Trinity!! This is a mystery that cannot be explained, even as it is profoundly true.

Second, Jesus has given us a profound new definition of “home”. If the heavenly home I sang about and which is described in our lesson from Revelation is our ultimate home, while we are on our way to that home, God the Father and Jesus are permanently at home in each one of us. This is nothing short of the continuing incarnation of God in our flesh! This knowledge can be a great source of comfort and encouragement to us. You and I are not alone as we face whatever comes our way in life. The Father is at home in us loving us. And Jesus is at home in us loving us and continually revealing more of himself to us, so that we are better able to keep his word. And, since Jesus and the Father are permanent residents, nothing—not one thing!—can separate us from their love.

Third, Jesus himself is the great example of what this indwelling means: it means sharing the love with which we are loved. “As the Father has loved me,” Jesus says, “so I have loved you.” (John 15:9) As the Father and Jesus have loved us, so ought we to love each other. God’s love indwells us, not as something to be hoarded; not as something simply for our own benefit; but as a gift to share with each other and with a world desperate for love. Some of you will remember Amy Donahue-Adams’ excellent sermon last Sunday in which she reminded us that Jesus has set the bar of love very high: we are called to love everyone with no exceptions! We can do this—we can follow Jesus’ example—by means of the power of Jesus and the Father dwelling in us.

In a few moments you are going to come to this table, which has been set here to nourish you as you try to follow Jesus’ example. As you take the bread and the wine into yourselves, remember the words of Jesus, “You who eat my flesh and drink my blood dwell in me and I dwell in you.” (John 6:56) Give thanks that the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit have made their dwelling place in you for good, so that you can share the gift of love you have been given.

Amen