

**I had to have a split nail repaired Friday. As I sat with the manicurist, she asked me what I was preaching on Sunday. This gospel of course is one of the few I can repeat from memory. I started, she finished. But when she got to “No one comes to the father except by me,” I had to say, “I don’t believe that.” And she said, “But it is in the Bible.” “I preached recently on Jesus’ words that God’s salvation is for all people, which is also in the Bible. “ “But suppose you are not right?” “To me, it is not about being right but about being loving.” “What about truth?” At that point, she had another person waiting. My chance at dealing with a literalist face to face was gone, perhaps to everyone’s benefit.**

**But I think the value of John’s familiar gospel is that it addresses one of the anxieties a St. Matthew’s committee member voiced at an Adult Ed meeting this past Thursday. Our anxiety about mortality. We are all suffering from mortality.**

*Perhaps* when we hear this John passage, mostly at funerals, we think, “That has been overdone,” or “Oh, that.” But when Philip, in verse 8, expresses a desire to *see* the Father Jesus speaks of, Philip’s request articulates the spiritual search of humankind. We are anxious about our mortality, whether we let that anxiety rise to the surface of our consciousness or not.

**Jesus knows that. *Do not let your hearts be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you and will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.***

**We might pray for the trust to put ourselves in the hands of Jesus, to commend our spirit to God from our deathbeds, wherever they may be, be they like John Updike's in an oncology unit musing on his lifelong fear of flying:**

*My terrors—the flight through the dazzling air, with  
the blinding flash, the final black—will be  
achieved from thirty inches, on a bed.*

**Or Richard Wilbur's more peaceful bedstead *at whose foot***

*The world will swim and flicker and be gone.*

**Updike ends up with other ancient words of comfort. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.***

**No matter how far we have come in our evolving theology; no matter how much we have studied the Jesus scholars and know that John's community, unlike the others gossellers, was unable to call upon founding witnesses to the Jesus tradition, that, in a situation of conflict and rejection, they needed to develop a confident post-Easter theology, surpassing the works of Jesus, directed and inspired by the Paraclete;**

**No matter how sophisticated we are, these words of Jesus about rooms in his Father's house answer a deep deep longing of our hearts. Our troubled hearts. John knew that, knew the disciples and all of us would forever fear afterlife and more, would long for home. A home. A house. Of God.**

**Jesus knows the way. He has been to hell and back. He knows the way to the place.**

*yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

**Like the shepherd of John 10, he calls us by name and leads us out. He goes ahead. Like the muscular shepherd Bishop White spoke of last Sunday Jesus fends off the thieves and the thugs who want to kill the sheep.**

**In many stories of afterlife are secret words we have to know or things we have to do to get by the fearsome beings that block our way, like the wolf that, without their caring shepherd, snatches the sheep away. If we can follow him whose voice we know, we need not fear.**

**According to this gospel today we follow Jesus to heaven which is where he belongs: he came from heaven and will return there. As a consequence, a place must be made ready for his followers. He says,**

*There are plenty of places to stay in my Father's house. If it weren't true, I would have told you; I'm on my way to make a place ready for you. And if I go to make a place ready for you, I'll return and embrace you. So where I am you can be too.*

**The evangelist is addressing the community after Jesus' death, a community without the physical presence of Jesus. There is anxiety about Jesus' absence.**

**As Bill Brosend has said, John 14: 1-9 is about our desire to know God, to know what God is like, what is God's relationship to us. "Show us that; no cloud, no bird, no leaf, no sunset can tell me.**

**The children see Mom and Dad putting on their coats. The children have three questions, always three questions, 'Where are you going? Can we go? Then who will stay with us?'**

**[The answer.] I am going to be with my father and your father. You cannot come now; you can come later. But I will not leave you orphans. I will send another friend, another helper who will never leave, but who will stay with you forever."**

**Jesus speaks encouragingly of his departure to his Father's house where there will be many abiding places. The house of the Father of Jesus is the realm of God. He will return in the future to take his disciples to himself, to the place where he is. The disciples' faltering belief in Jesus must hold firm. Belief and trust are the only way to their goal, which is oneness with the Father. Jesus is in the Father and the Father in Jesus but they have not come to believe in this oneness.**

**The increased greatness of his works lies in their being done in his name, *after his departure*. The departure opens a new era when the works of the disciples surpass those of Jesus, because Jesus will be *present in his absence*, as the disciples do the work he has been doing.**

**But for me, the most comforting words of all are about God's house. About the rooms. Perhaps a house is not fraught with the symbolism for you that it is for me, the daughter of an architect. Houses were what it was all about as I grew up. My father's last words were "I see a beautiful house!" I spent my childhood climbing on boards hammered together in the air: what would soon be rooms. Virginia Woolf's "A Room of My Own" was important to me as a high school student. A room of my own in eternity is harder to grasp, but, as long as I may freely come and go, appealing. Like the hermitage monasteries where you live in your own little dwelling, with your own little garden, but share meals with the other monks, as family. I have a fantasy of a heaven where we live together and in some way still work towards the kingdom of God on earth.**

**And a film we watched last week captured some of this feeling I have about rooms and houses. It was a film we got from Netflix. A 2008 film that brought me back to real life from the whirligig of Derby and royal weddings, even Easter week, to feeling what is real in life. It is called "I've Loved you So Long" with Kristin Scott Thomas. I avoided it for a long time because it was about a woman who has been released from prison. Her much younger sister takes her into her own family, with all the problems you can imagine that involving. But in her reentry after fifteen years, all in the world that is nuanced, that is kind, that is small and loving, came back to me. Once in a while a film can do that. Reintroduce you to your emotions that count, what cleaves you to those you love, what matters in the small gestures and movements of our daily lives.**

**The film was about a household of two children, a mother, father, aphasic grandfather who now take in the mother's sister when she gets out of prison. It turns out the woman was a doctor and the life she took was actually euthanasia: injecting her son to save him from tremendous suffering. But the story is really about her rebirth, her afterlife, given a room in her sister's house.**

**Unbeknownst to her, her little sister has prepared a place for her. In her own house. You see her wonder that she is being given her room, that it is prepared for her. And you watch the sensitive choices of the camera as she oh so slowly, over so many weeks, painfully lets her senses awaken to that house, its music, its shared meals, its children, the love of her sister.**

**So What next for the disciples? What next for us? What rooms will we inhabit? Who will take us in?**

**“I will take you to myself.” That promise is part of the bed stone: It is the core of our faith. If we can't believe in this promise, trust in it, nothing else matters much. These six words are so simple. There are no conditions, qualifiers, or exceptions. The promise is straightforward, intimate, and filled with love: “Don't be afraid; I haven't forgotten you; I will come back for you; I will take you to myself; you are mine.”**

