

“Making a Home”
a sermon by Rev Sue Strachan based on John 14:1-14
Wolcott Congregational Church
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I would guess most of you can complete this sentence - “In my Father’s house there are many . . . rooms, mansions, dwelling places.” These words are most often heard at a memorial service for it is comforting to think of our loved one being in that better place, a glorious mansion resplendent with the blessings of heaven. A couple of the modern translations use the word ‘rooms,’ and I got thinking about that, about how in that translation Jesus comes full circle. Remember, when Jesus was about to be born into this world there was no room at the inn. Even though we had no place for him, Jesus goes and prepares a place, makes room, for us. In God’s house there is room for many and none who are in need will be turned away. Isn’t that what Jesus taught throughout his whole ministry, to make room for others, to open up God’s house to all who would hear? I don’t think this is just a word for our future final journey, it is also a word for our immediate future as we enter into the work Jesus set before us as the body of Christ; to be open and ready, making room for all.

So, of the three translations – mansions, rooms, and dwelling places I choose the last. Mansions seem big and empty and rooms seem small and cramped, while a dwelling place is a “room with a view,” a place to reflect, to rest, to find comfort and joy; a place where one wants to spend unhurried time, where we welcome the company of loved ones. It is the difference between having a house and having a home. Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you in my Father’s house; a place to come home to; a place where love can be found.” And Jesus said, “I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

I think it is for us to find our home in God. For many the very thought of God was one of might, of judgment, of wrath. God was too big, too demanding, incomprehensible, immovable, omniscient and omnipresent and one of the most frequently used words “terrifying.” It was taught and believed that no one could see God and live to tell about it. But, Jesus came to change all of that. He came down from heaven to show us who and how God is. According to the lesson for today, whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father; whoever knows Jesus knows God the Father. The verb used here to know is not about having knowledge or gaining information, it is about having a relationship. Those who know Jesus, believe in Jesus, trust in Jesus will also know, in their heart of hearts, to believe in and trust in God. There was an understanding in the culture of biblical times, that if a father sent his son to transact business it was the same as transacting business with the father himself. Jesus said, “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

So what kind of a God do we see in Jesus? Jesus showed compassion to those in need; prayed for others, fed and healed those in his presence. Jesus welcomed the outcast and the sick. Jesus forgave those in need of forgiveness and praised those who had strong faith and were generous in spirit. Jesus liked to celebrate and have a good meal with friends. Jesus taught and challenged each one to go beyond their own comfort zone in how to look at life and relationship with people and with God. When asked what the Greatest commandment was, Jesus said, “Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself” was even written

in a short enough version to be tweeted, “Love one another.” I believe that the disciples found themselves safe at home with Jesus; safe and saved. It is what he offered them beyond their everyday friendships, beyond their family and business ties; a place where heaven and earth can meet and all could and can say, “It is Well With My Soul.”

I believe that we are best able to feel the wholeness of God, that deep sense of wellness in which all things are right with the world when we are out there doing our part, serving those around us in need of love and strength and support and compassion and celebration and joy and inclusion – all the ways Jesus made the disciples feel at home with him. We are, by our works in word and deed, to be the ones through whom all others will come to know God. Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” The question and the challenge this puts before us is not that you and I must go evangelize the world and make Christians out of everyone. We can do that and should always be telling the story of salvation through Jesus, but I think what this scripture puts before us is something oh so much more challenging. I think it asks us whether or not the people with whom we come in contact, those at home, at work, at school, at play, on facebook, twitter, Instagram, Snap Chat... if those people will see Jesus in all that we do and say, for today’s lesson tells us, “Whoever has seen me has seen the One whom Jesus called Father” and the only way anyone is going to see Jesus is if they see him in you and in me. According to Jesus, we can help others believe purely because of the works that we will do in his name. “Greater works” Jesus calls them. Could it be that the word ‘greater’ was used, not because we would somehow do more miracles or fantastic healings, but because Jesus placed the whole world in their hands (and ours) to the end that all will come to know Jesus and his Father? I think as a congregation we do this pretty well, not only by the ways we reach out to others here, but all the ways each of you have found to add your gifts and talents, your care and energy to building up our community and the world around.

Jesus said, “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” Oh, if only these words could literally come true, “Whatever we ask.” I would guess secretly if not overtly we would love to have a God more like the State Farm agent, “Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there. I want a new ...” Or maybe we could just ask Alexa. But, it does not quite work that way. The traditional interpretations can give us a few different ideas about this passage. One is that if we indeed had enough faith and prayed hard enough, our prayers would be answered. In another gospel we are told that our faith could move mountains. A second traditional interpretation is that we do not always pray right, that our prayers should match God’s will and when that happens then they will be answered. And I guess that is true enough, except, I don’t think we are supposed to just make a generic prayer like, “Dear God, praying for your will tonight, don’t really know what it is, but that’s OK with me. Amen.” I think we have to do some discerning and challenging, some searching and asking when we pray. Jesus said we would be doing greater things, so we have to open ourselves up to discover what those are and do our part. God did not create us to just rubber stamp what he wants, manipulating us into compliance. God gave us a brain, a mind, a body and a heart. So let us always remember the Greatest Commandment – Love God with all your heart, soul, body, mind and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. And then do what Jesus commanded, love one another as he loved us. If we are doing that, it will be well with our souls and we will know the promise is true, “whatever we ask in Jesus’ name.” Amen.