

Where do You live?

Prepared May 2020

John 14:1-14

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Introduction

Our strange season continues!

Some of the words I feel apply are: disruption, strain, monotony, uncertainty, isolation, powerlessness, boredom and possibly bewilderment at how others behave in shared public spaces.

Barbara's niece is a young mother of 4. Her lockdown in NZ is intense. She posted a few days ago that her eldest asked: “Mummy what day is it?” and she honestly did not know! I thought that illustrated a level of disorientation as our known rhythms and markers are not happening. It suggests something of the 90s film ‘Groundhog Day.’!

Another friend and pastor colleague wrote that he was now dreaming about powerpoint problems, so intense is his on-line church ministry.

For myself I am so happy to get in the car and go somewhere.

I enjoy Zoom meetings too much.

I have been weaned off handshakes and hugs too but....

I sense a smouldering grief is at work among us as we register the loss being experienced. If you have lost a dear one locally or across the oceans that grief is much hotter but in general it's a creeping sense of loss from what we expect in early summer looking forward.

You can indicate by Zoom if this describes your experience.

At the same time I sense that there is more prayer and study happening within the church.

Many people have firmed up their membership by registering and subscribing digitally and a few are moving away by breaking digital ties.

But the enforced limitation on our busy rhythm is bringing –I sense- is a sense of loss and uncertainty.

Text

So having read the newspaper of our time and reviewed what I am hearing locally I pick up John's Gospel for today: 14.1-14

This is not a very focused portion of scripture with Jesus addressing various issues that may seem hard to align.

We are reading it in Resurrection time when Jesus was appearing to his disciples and preparing them for his ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit but its actually set back before going to Jerusalem and the crucifixion.

Jesus begins by saying:

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

He addresses those with troubled hearts.

That might include us?

Somewhere deep inside we might feel troubled at the level of core commitment.

What seemed clear in the ‘old normal’ has been paused and we await a ‘new normal’ in which we might be able to plan and live. Right now we are adjusting to something in between. ¹

Interestingly he speaks to us as people in control of our own heart. He assumes self-control.

You can decide to be troubled or not.

His basic command is to not allow yourself to be troubled but to believe, trust, obey, and hope in God and Jesus.

Sounds Good!

It's a core spiritual insight that fear must be displaced by faith.

I believe Queen Elizabeth of the United Kingdom brought a very similar message this week speaking during a pandemic on the occasion of the 75th commemoration of Victory in Europe. In summary she said: “Never give up, never despair.”

I wonder if this also reflects Paul’s comments about Love in 1 Corinthians 13 that:

⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I have drifted back to the newspaper to show resonances with what Jesus teaches,

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

Q Would Jesus give such an instruction if it were not possible?

A I doubt it.

So tell yourself, instruct your heart: “Do not be troubled. Trust in God and Jesus”

That’s the easy part of the message, at least if you have good self-control.

What follows is rich and diverse but I will take out one strand to equip us in applying this.

¹ Living in-between or in the ‘already-not-yet’ is actually the frame we live in all the time – but that's too much to explore right now.

It comes down to a simple Question:

Q Where do you live?

Or, where is your home and the place you find the real food and rest you need for your life?

19 years ago I had the opportunity to study a new church plant in the Church of England that was not a parish. It proceeded from the realisation is that while most people have a postal address where their mail is delivered, where they sleep and keep their things. However, this may not be where they really live.

It's a difficulty that works for many in the strict lockdown where those with a big home on a property can survive lockdown but those in a small apartment or studio are used to living out in the public space and struggle with being confined to their small unit. Those people are cut off from life as they know it.

So this post-parish church plant in the North of England set out to be church in the places where people lived their lives and not where they slept or washed their clothes. It focused on social address over physical address.

Since then we have realised that many people live substantially online with an IP address for whom their online life and presence is more life determining than their physical location.

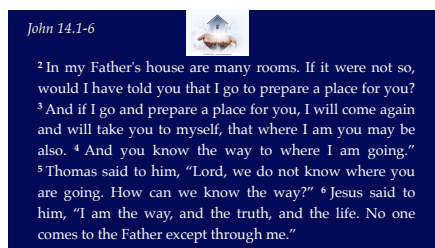
Jesus himself was once asked: "Where do you live?" GNB or, "Where are you staying?" ESV His answer was curious - as might have been expected: [John 1.39]

He said to them, "Come and you will see."

On that day they saw a place but in the months and years that followed he would let them see another place.

To my reading it is in chapter 14 that Jesus now talks about where he actually lives.

Let's hear Jesus' explanation before it opens out into wider implications.



²In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

This might seem a good passage to read at funerals as if it's promising a room in heaven. I am not alone in thinking that is not the house or home Jesus is pointing to.

The place he points to is the bond between the Father and himself as the Son.

- That is where Jesus lives.
- That is what Jesus lives out of.
- That is what Jesus is going to expand to accommodate those who believe and trust in him.

Jesus had talked elsewhere about sharing his life, here he was talking about sharing his home. The source and base of our life would be his as he lives in the Father.

That honest man Thomas -wrongly labelled as 'doubting' - speaks the honest question:

⁵ ... "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

My amplified translation: "Lord we don't have a map for where you live."

Application

So let's put it together:

Don't let your hearts be troubled believe in God, believe in me.

You may feel homeless, disrupted, and as if you have lost everything, even me (Jesus)
There is a place prepared for you in the most powerful bond of love, the most grounded reality in the heart of God.

That is the place to live.

The people he was talking to who followed him would only know disruption, loss, uncertainty and persecution in this world. They may not have realised that yet but after the death, resurrection and ascension they would.

They would never know settled retirement plans, cultivated gardens or comfortable homes. That was not their assigned home.

But do not be troubled in heart. Know your home in me and the Father's great love for me.
Live from that.

So as the lockdown continues to trim our opportunities and problems emerge that we cannot solve, check that your address is in the right place: Are we living out of faith in Jesus and the Father forming a house with space for us to live in and out of?

Is that good news the roof over our heads, the floor beneath our feet, the bed we sleep in and the table we gather at?

Through Jesus our home is in God now. This is our right address.
Do you live there?