

**Message: “You Know the Way”**

**Many people are interested in their family history.** Some really want to know “Who?”, “What?” and “How?”. And there are different ways to learn. Some of us dig into archives to get information. Some do leg work to get information. One person visited cemeteries and recorded information on tombstones. In one of the cemeteries, they noticed a tombstone with an unusual inscription:

“Pause now stranger, as you pass by; as you are now, so once was I.

As I am now, so soon you will be, prepare yourself to follow me.”

Next to the tombstone was a piece of wood, where someone wrote this reply:

“To follow you, I am not content, until I know which way you went.”

**I think this captures the sentiment expressed by the disciples in response to Jesus when he said,** *“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. [God’s] house has room to spare. If that weren’t [so], would I have told you I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I’ll return and take you to be with me so where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I’m going.”*

**Then dear, loving and practical Thomas asked,** *“Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?”* (John 14:2-5).

**What a bold question!** Thank God for Thomas, who asks what’s in everyone’s mind: theirs, yours and mine. Phillip joins in a minute later, confirming his support for Jesus, while making his own statement, *“Lord, just show us”* (v8).

**This resonates with us.** The image of an eternal home with many dwelling places and spaces is expansive and inclusive. The assurance Jesus goes to prepare a place for us is comforting and hopeful. All we have to do is follow him. Sounds easy, but it seems hard to live.

**Jesus’ words of encouragement,** **“Don’t let your heart be troubled”** (v1) are something we all need at times. He’s saying, “You got this. You can do this.” Amen.

**This scripture is frequently heard at memorial services.** I suspect I’ve shared it more than any other gospel passage.

**This goes beyond a memorial service, though.** It's exactly what we need to hear when we're living in heart-troubling times, when we've lost our way, we're not sure the center will hold, and it feels like life and the world are collapsing in on us.

**Who doesn't know what that's like?** It's what the disciples were experiencing. It's what the people who went before us experienced. It's our experience. And it'll be the experience of generations to come.

**In heart-troubling times, we want to know there's shelter from the storms of life, a safe space and place for us.** We want to know we belong, we matter, and we're included in God's care. We want to know there's a way forward even when we can't see the way. I suspect we all know what this is like.

**What troubles your heart today?** How have you lost your center? What's causing you to feel like you've lost your way? What place in life do you need to get to?

**When Jesus prepares a place for us,** it isn't an imaginary theme park or a place for the shut-ins or the sick, but a special place. Heaven isn't just make-believe. It's the best of creation, the height of God's splendor. In heaven all things will be made new. We'll have new bodies without cancer, blindness, diabetes, arthritis, heart disease or any physical, mental or emotional illness, condition or pain of any kind.

**In his book on heaven, Dwight Moody once said,** "When I was a child, I thought of heaven as a great shining city, with vast walls, domes and spires with nobody in it except white robed angels who were strangers to me."<sup>1</sup>

**Then Dwight's little brother died.** That changed everything. Dwight thought of that great city in the same way except his little brother was there. As more of Moody's relatives died, the heavenly flock began to grow. But it wasn't until Moody's own son died that he began to think heaven contained a little bit of him too. As time went on, he knew more people in heaven than he did on earth, and the place became even more special.

**I like this image of heaven.** I expect you do, too.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rockumchurch.com/2017/05/18/sermon-let-not-your-heart-be-troubled/>

**For me, two questions come to mind:** “How do I prepare?” and “What does it mean to me today?” Let’s take a few minutes to reflect.

**Here’s an example of what a prepared heart is like.**

A woman with a terminal illness was given three months to live. As she began to get her things in order, she contacted her pastor to discuss some of her final wishes. When they arrived, she told them which songs she wanted sung, the scriptures to be read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. She even asked for her favorite Bible to be placed in the coffin with her.

**As the pastor was about to leave, she said,** “There is one more thing. I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.”

**Then she explained,** “In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, ‘Keep your fork.’”

**She continued,** “It was my favorite part of the meal because I knew something better was coming, like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie.

**So, when people see me in the casket with a fork in my hand and ask,** ‘What’s with the fork?’, I want you to tell them: ‘Keep your fork. The best is yet to come.’”<sup>2</sup>

**You may know this story. I do.** My father said exactly the same thing to Esperanza and me three years before he died.

**The best is yet to come.** What a marvelous way to look to the life to come in heaven! It’s also a marvelous way to look at the life we live here on earth.

**When we hear about God’s house, we may focus on the destination and ignore the journey.** But I think Jesus is telling us about more than an end-of-life reward. I don’t think it’s about some future time and place apart from today’s troubled hearts. I think it’s about the journey through the heart-troubling times of this life.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

**That journey is about making space and place.** That's what Jesus says he's doing. "*I go to prepare a place for you,*" he says. Jesus is a place maker. He makes space and place for others to enter.

**Jesus is always creating spaces and places for us to enter a greater fullness of life.** They're places of life, love, healing and joy. Places of mercy and forgiveness. Places of beauty, generosity and hope. These become for us places of reconciliation and resurrection.

**Think about the Bible narratives you love most.** I'll bet they're stories about opening spaces and places: the prodigal son, the woman healed, the blind man having his eyes opened, the raising of Lazarus, the Easter story.

**I think we love these stories because they're our stories.**

Through them, we see the time someone made space and place for us to find ourselves, ground ourselves, and become more fully our truer selves. We remember when someone opened room in their heart to us and it made a difference. It offered healing, hope and a way forward. It helped us re-center and recover ourselves.

**Who has been a place maker for you?** How did they make space for you? What difference has it made in your life? In whatever ways they did, they were echoing Jesus, "*I prepare a place for you.*"

**Making space and place for creation is a holy calling.** It's what God started. It's what Jesus reveals. It's the Spirit living within us. We, too, can be place makers. It's one of the ways God shares life with us.

**My sense today is people are waiting,** needing and even dying for a space and place to be opened to them. Wherever space and place are closed, life is diminished, impoverished and sometimes taken. Place making just might be an antidote to the pain, disconnect and violence we see happening around us.

**But many of us were told or came to believe we must create a place for ourselves.** If we don't do it no one will. We've been convinced space is limited and so we work more for ourselves than others. We strive to make our place through comparison and competition, struggles for power and control, agendas, reputations and accomplishments. Place making for ourselves is often grounded in our fear and defensiveness.

**Today's gospel calls all of this into question.** There are two signs you'll never see on the door of God's house: "Reservations required," and "No vacancy."

**There's enough space and place for everyone.** "*In God's house there are many dwelling places.*" If we really take this to heart, we'd be opening doors and making space wherever we go for whomever we see. Isn't that what Jesus did?

**That's how I want to live. It's what I want for you and this parish.**

**How might you be a place maker for someone?**

Maybe it's as simple as a smile or a word of encouragement. Maybe it's sitting in prayer during the week. Maybe it's offering or asking for forgiveness. Maybe it's the warmth and presence of a touch. Maybe it's seeing and responding to another's needs. Maybe it's the long slow work of social justice and change. We make space and place in a thousand different ways.

**There are lots of spaces and places to open.** I sometimes wonder if we can do this, if I can do this. Jesus thinks we can. He says, "*Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these*" (v12).

**"Greater works than these."** Maybe "Can we do this?" isn't the question to ask. Maybe the question is, "How will we make a place for our neighbors?"

*Let us pray ...*

**John 14:1-14 (CEB)**

“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I’m going.”

Thomas asked, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us.”

Jesus replied, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don’t speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does his works. Trust me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.”