

Easter 5A (5/14/17)

**Acts 7:55-60**

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

1 Peter 2:2-10

**John 14:1-14**

*We long for the security of home. Yet, we recognize that home cannot shield us from the hazards of life, including the life of discipleship. Our hearts are troubled by our helplessness in the face of pain and loss. But ultimately, our home is with God, who makes room for us in life and death.*

I finally painted the upstairs bathroom. It's been almost a year since we moved in, so the paint sat in the can for months. But I finally painted the upstairs bathroom. I also trimmed the apple tree, with Steve and Kevin's help. Heaven knows how long it's been since that got done. My uncle Lynn repaired the back gate and built a new one out front. So now, Alex can play in the yard without us worrying that she'll wander into the street. Just in time to build her a playhouse, with gratitude for the assist from Kyle. It's really starting to feel like our place. It's starting to feel like home.

Home is where you can tinker to your heart's content, although you'll never be done. It's where you can let your hair down and put your feet up. It's where you can truly be yourself. Spend the day in your pajamas? Why not? Eat over the kitchen sink? No problem. Converse with your pets as if they understand you? Whatever suits your fancy. But most importantly, home is where your people are, where you find love and acceptance; or at least, as

Robert Frost puts it, “Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”<sup>1</sup>

**We long for the security of home. But, we also recognize the limits of that security.** We know deep down that our homes are not inviolable. They’re vulnerable to break-ins, yes, but they’re also subject to our own brokenness – to domestic violence, addiction, selfishness, pride. Our homes are liable to deteriorate, yes, but they’re also subject to our own deterioration – our exhaustion, our chronic illness, our estrangement, our regret.

We long for the security of home. Yet, we understand that home cannot shield us from the hazards of life, including the life of discipleship. In our first reading from Acts, we hear the story of Stephen’s martyrdom, and we’re reminded that faith does not protect us from suffering and loss. In fact, Stephen’s death is a direct consequence of his witness to the crucified Messiah. **Not only does discipleship involve leaving home, that is, stepping out from comfort and familiarity, but it also involves risk. Discipleship means speaking truth courageously to power, standing in solidarity with crucified people, and exercising compassion even in spite of suffering:** “Lord,” Stephen prays in his final moments, “do not hold this sin against them.”

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<sup>1</sup> “The Death of the Hired Man.”

No wonder Jesus makes a point to reassure his followers. “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” he urges in our Gospel from John today. Easier said than done. We are rightfully troubled by our helplessness in the face of pain and loss. And, **the Christian life certainly doesn’t guarantee the kind of security we long for in a home, the peace of mind we’d like to make for ourselves.**

But, the home that Jesus promises is like no place we can build with our own hands. In fact, the home Jesus promises is no place at all. Prior to his own execution, Jesus speaks a word of encouragement and hope to his followers:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.... 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.

As he prepares to die, Jesus is less concerned with the geography of life after death than he is with being together. **Rather than a location**, in other words, **our true home is a relationship.<sup>2</sup> Jesus’ pledge is to take us to himself, to be with us – Emmanuel – in both life and death. Despite the insecurity of our earthly homes, despite our fragility, God makes room for us, and in the end, our home is with God.<sup>3</sup>**

I can’t speak for mothers and other women who provide motherly care, but my guess is that you understand this kind of permanent love. No matter

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<sup>2</sup> See Gail R. O’Day, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. IX, 740.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Rossing,

[http://members.newproclamation.com/commentary.php?d8m=5&d8d=18&d8y=2014&atom\\_id=25053](http://members.newproclamation.com/commentary.php?d8m=5&d8d=18&d8y=2014&atom_id=25053).

your children's phase of life, no matter the distance they travel from you, no matter the kinds of homes they make for themselves, you will always make room for them.

My prayer for mothers and children alike, and indeed for all of us, is that we are able to rest in God's promise to do the same. If our home is finally with God, then it's less about where we hang our hats and more about where we hang our hearts.<sup>4</sup> So, **let's hang our troubled hearts on God our true home, Christ Jesus the corner stone, and the Holy Spirit, by whom we have come to know God's enduring love in the first place.**

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<sup>4</sup> See Martin Luther, as cited by Cynthia A. Jarvis, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 2, 467.