

May 10th 2020 Sermon for 5th Sunday after Easter –

Rev Joshua Brocklesby, Curate of St Mary's Church Watford

**Gospel Reading** John 14: 1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

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

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

Jesus answered; “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who 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 that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, who ever believes in me will do the works I have been doing. And they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

This is the Word of the Lord.

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I love the Gospel of John. If I ever feel a bit empty or low I head to the Gospel of John and it doesn’t fail to recharge and reinvigorate me. And our Gospel reading today is a perfect example of this. There is so much contained within those 14 verses. And I don’t think it would be an exaggeration to say there are many many sermons which can be given from it. Today I want us to mainly focus on one line from the passage. “In my Father’s house there are many rooms” or depending on your translation you might also have “dwelling places”.

Now I think this verse might resonate with us all, all the more due to our current confinement. We have, the majority of us, been spending a lot of time in homes and houses and rooms. And for many of us our homes are extensions of ourselves, with what they contain and how they look saying much about us. When I moved here to Watford I remember how daunting it was moving into the Curate’s house and seeing not only all the work that needed to be done but also how many rooms there were to fill. In the years before I had got used to having only two rooms or perhaps only one which I could call my

own. University accommodation, regardless of age, doesn't tend to give you much space. But in moving into the Curate's house I had many rooms to fill. An incredibly privileged position to be in but normally when one has multiple rooms it tends to mean you not only need them but also have the money to fill them, something which is definitely not the case for me. But what you can do when you have an abundance of space is you can offer it to others. And in my case I invited my younger brother to live with me and in doing so that helped to fill the space in the house.

But as I'm sure so many of us are finding out, living together is not always easy. Living in a shared space means we gain from the other people living with us but we also have to sacrifice some things. And so perhaps now during lockdown people have appreciated if they are lucky enough, or perhaps desired if they don't, having their own room or space in the house. Somewhere they can go which feels like theirs. Maybe that's been the shed at the bottom of the garden or maybe its escaping to the guest room or maybe its simply going for that walk alone. When we're living in a community it is nice to have our own space at times.

And I think there is also a lot we can learn from someone from the type of house they have. From what they put on the walls, how they decorate it, how tidy or messy it is. When we enter someone's home we learn a bit about the person too. And so I think we can learn a lot from the passage we have from Jesus about God, as he talks about his Father's house. And what we learn should not only be a comfort for later in life but also for the here and now.

First, and I think this is important to remember, Jesus speaks of a house. We might think and associate God with a palace or something grand and big but Jesus speaks of God's house, a home. Another reminder if we ever need one we have a humble God whom we should not expect to find in luxury or grandeur but in humility and simplicity.

The second thing of note we learn about God is that this home has many rooms. In fact there are so many rooms that we each will have one prepared for us. There is something incredibly beautiful about this imagery. It reminds us that we are individuals and that means we are all different, we are all unique and so everyone's room would reflect this, each representative and just right for you. So in a time when we might be craving the perfect space just for us, we are told that in our Father's house that is what we will have. We have a God who understands and celebrates our individuality and that is therefore reflected in God's home. We each have our own space. But there is another side to this and that is although we might all have our own rooms, we do not live separately from God nor from each other. We live in community. God desires us to live in community, not only with one another but also with God. If we think about God's house being a place where everyone flourishes to the maximum then it seems our flourishing comes when we find the balance between space for our own creativity and individuality, but also connection and shared living with others. And at the heart of it all God and the need for us to dwell and rest in God's love, allowing it to surround and be at the heart of all we do.

And the final thing I want us to think about from this section of our passage is that Jesus goes to prepare our room for us. We are not left looking and thinking about how much there is to do; instead our room is prepared, it is ready for our arrival. All the anxiety and effort of the move is taken away from us. We have somewhere to live where all is ready

and waiting. A beautiful thing to think about. Now there is much I think this passage tells us which should be a comfort for us for years to come but that is not where I want us to focus our thoughts today. Instead I want us to hold what we have just heard together with the prayer of Jesus that “Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”. Jesus here is saying as your house is God in heaven, let it also be here too on earth. And so we are called therefore, not only to gain comfort from what and how we will live but to strive to live like that right now.

So what does that mean? Well for a start, we need to start thinking about finding the balance in our lives between our individuality and need for our own space while remaining deeply connected and living with others. So first we need to think about ourselves. I’m not sure if you’ve ever done this or done it recently but have you taken time to think about yourself? To think about how unique you are; what your likes and dislikes are; what brings you joy and happiness; what you like doing and don’t like doing – because you are special and unique. God has a room just for you, that’s how special you are. But we need to live that out now too. We need to know ourselves and we need to celebrate our uniqueness, because we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Once we accept and come to this reality of our uniqueness which God has imparted us with, then by taking the model of God’s home we need to bring this back to community. We do not live in individual homes with God, but instead have our own rooms. And so we are to bring our beautiful uniqueness to community where we can share who and what we are with others and also gain a gift of having them share who and what they are with us. It’s not all about us, it’s about us in relation to everyone else. And I think Jesus makes this clear when he calls us to love our neighbour as ourself. To love others in the beauty of their uniqueness like it was and is with our uniqueness. The beautiful poem by John Dunn comes to mind here “No man is an island” or let’s bring it up to date and remove the gender language by saying “nobody is an island”. We are all part of something bigger and we need to think and live in community. It is how we were created to be and it is how we will eventually be with God, so let’s live in community now too.

This might be difficult to think about when we are stuck in our homes, but actually I think this is a great time to give this thought. Many of us will be living in a way at the moment where the balance is towards us too much, perhaps as an individual. So we can spend time thinking how we can live more in community when restrictions are lifted. Maybe its deciding or thinking about having more meals and gatherings for friends. Maybe its engaging more with the church community and everything that’s going on. There are many ways to seek to live more in community. And now I think is a great time for us think about how we might do this, as and when the restrictions allow. But perhaps we also need to take time to think about how beautifully unique others are.

If you have watched or are tuning into the evening service, I will be encouraging people to think about someone whom they love; a friend or someone from their family. And think about how beautifully unique they are and to pray for them. So perhaps after this you might want to do the same. Think about that person and what they like and dislike, what makes them who they are and celebrate that in prayer. Perhaps also you might find out there are things you don’t know about this person but would like to. And maybe you’d like to have a conversation with them later today or in the week to come.

But for now remember we need to celebrate our own beauty and uniqueness and also that of others. We all live together in the same home. We are all equals in God's house and we need to learn to celebrate this and gain joy from it. Because we tend to be selfish and have negative feelings to others and this tends to happen when we're scared or fear that what we have will be taken from us. It can happen easily; perhaps it's the new person at work who you deep down think is better at the job than you, or perhaps it's a friend who you think is more gifted or perhaps more attractive. Or maybe its just a neighbour with a nicer car. We can feel resentment to others for many reasons and that can block out our joy. But we need to remember in God's house we all have a room and it cannot be taken from us. We have nothing to fear, God loves us just as much as anyone else and that can never change. And its in this knowledge we need to learn to be better at celebrating others without thinking it in any way lessens or demeans us because your worth and beauty comes from the fact that you are unique to God. Nothing can change that and that should give us the security to find joy in others too.

Lastly and its left to now because it's the most important and so if you remember one thing from what I've said hopefully it is this. We are meant to dwell with God. We live, flourish and find life when we live with God. And God is love. And we therefore need to live in and with that love. We learn from the beginning of John's Gospel that everything, the whole of creation all we see around us, was made through and in that love and so we need to take time to realise this. At the heart of our homes and our communities needs to be God's love. Because it is God's love that will allow us to flourish as we live together. It is God's love that gently shows us after the argument we just had, that perhaps we might have overreacted or might have been at fault. And it is God's love that should give us the strength and security to show love to others by apologising, by being honest, by being appropriately vulnerable with each other.

There is a lovely sense at the moment of us all being in this together as we continue to support each other to stand up to Covid-19. But that feeling will not last for ever. And so as Christians we need to ensure that God's love is at the heart of our communities, so that we continue to be a template to others of living this out. Because if we believe as Jesus says that we are to bring God's home on earth as it is in heaven, then we have a lot of work to do. We need to strive to reduce inequality. We need to strive to remove injustice. We need to work to bring about peace. Our communities have to be beacons of light in this world now and for what is to come. It's a tough challenge but God's vision for how we are to live I think, is too beautiful not to try. So where ever we are today, whatever we are going through, let's remember our future is beautiful and we are given the challenge of bringing that beauty to earth here and now. So let us live today, tomorrow and in the days to come living as we will eventually, in the house where God dwells. Amen.