

Worship for the Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 7, 2023

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

I am the vine, you are the branches, says the Lord.

Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

*Prayer of the Day

O God, form the hearts of your people into a single will.

Make us love what you command and desire what you promise,

that amid all the changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where joy is found,

through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Hymn 361 Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation, verses 1 and 2

Prayer of Confession

Holy and merciful God,

in your presence, we confess our failure to be what you created us to be.

You alone know how often we have sinned in wandering from your ways,

in wasting your gifts, in forgetting your love.

By your mercy, help us live in your light and walk in your ways,

for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

*Hymn Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

Believe the good news of the gospel:

our sins are forgiven. Be at peace.

First Reading 1 Peter 2:2-10

Time for Young Believers

Gospel Reading John 14: 1-14

The Morning Message

What is the story of your home?

How would you describe it to others?

Would you begin with the price, the design, or the builder, or the neighborhood, or the fine schools that attracted you in the first place?

Maybe it is the home's history that is so compelling.

We've lived in the same house for over thirty-five years, but, our present home has been bought and sold so many times, that when a "For Sale by Owner" sign once went up in the front yard, it simply read:

"Look what's for sale again!"

One of the families who lived there had ten kids. We had only three and when company came, we had bodies all over the place. I can't imagine how we'd manage a family of ten in the confines of our house.

What comes to mind when Jesus says he goes to prepare a place for you? What image comes to mind? How does the promised future shape your life now, today? Do you even think about it?

Pastor Janet Hunt writes that she recently saw an exhibit at the Minnesota History Museum. It was called, "If These Walls Could Talk." She describes the experience of walking through the history of one house in St. Paul- to hear about the different families who lived there: immigrants all, and also to witness how their lives had been changed by the rapid advances in industry and technology in the years many had arrived.

Janet says it was her privilege to officiate at the funeral of the woman, who, along with her husband, had built the home in which Janet now lived.

It was in visiting with the woman's children that she gained a glimpse into the house's personality, a window into the lives and faith of those who had first called it "home."

She says she can only imagine the hope that filled them when the woman welcomed her husband home from war, got married, and bought land on Meadow Lane where they would build a home. The first build was a simple one: a kitchen and living room, two bedrooms and a bath, all sitting atop a basement they never felt the need to finish. The house was small and sturdy and just right for their family of three. They had just been blessed by the birth of a daughter. A son followed close behind and they found they needed more space. So they hoisted the roof right up and turned the attic into more bedrooms and a bathroom and remodeled the downstairs to better suit their changing needs.

Janet says when she met with the family, they pulled out the photo albums, and she found herself searching for glimpses of the house she lived in in its original shape. She looked for pictures of the additions or re-models as they happened. But, those pictures didn't exist. The albums were full, but, the subject of all the pictures were of what? They were of the family members, the young couple who became Mom and Dad, of babies wrapped in fringed shawls being borne into the house from the hospital, a son in a scout uniform, a daughter in a prom dress.

And so it is for all of us, at least those of us who know the privilege of having a home. While the architecture or garden or workshop of a particular domicile are meaningful, the most interesting part of a house is the story of those whose lives were built within it.

I know some of you have moved in recent months, and some are planning moves. All three of our daughters sold and bought new homes during the pandemic. There were some anxious times when all that was going on. Frustration, deadlines, upgrades, repairs, open houses, moving from one city to another, finding new jobs, in the case of one of our daughters and her husband. Having a place to lay our heads is important and can become complicated.

So, we should welcome Jesus' first words about the home he is preparing for us: "Don't let your hearts be troubled, and don't be afraid."

I have no idea what this promised home will look like. I don't think my wish list will include a fireplace this time or stainless steel appliances. It won't matter if the school bus comes by the house, or if the neighbors keep their lawn mowed.

I can imagine it will be a place of peace and welcome, a place so comfortable that I never again think about the need for safety and security. It will be the place we have strived to create here on earth, where our children were loved and nurtured and friends and pets welcomed. Where we dropped into a cozy chair at the end of a hard day, where aromas from the kitchen smelled like love.

Some of you knew Gray Hampton. Gray was a long-time and much-loved pastor in Huntington. At his funeral, one of his daughters described what happened in the Hampton home when a summer thunderstorm arrived. Gray would rearrange the living room, turning the sofa, where it stood with its back to the big picture window, completely around so that the whole family, all six of them, could sit together, tucked safely inside the house, sheltered from the wind and rain and lightning, while watching the meteorological show outside.

This home Jesus is preparing for us will be something like that—designed and created out of love, constructed by the master designer. There will be plenty of room—no need for bumping out a wall or raising the roof. No need for power or heat sources or paint. No need for keys.

I don't know the dimensions, or if it will be brick or frame or stucco. It doesn't matter. But, my friends, I do know this: when we arrive we will know we are home.

It is no surprise that these words in John's gospel are often read at funerals. They are a great comfort when we need to hear them most. We are reminded of a great promise- that when our time for making a home on earth is done, a place is waiting for us in God's own house.

I visited Sue Yoak this week and she told me about the family tree of photos she planned to create on one of the walls of her single room at the nursing home. She has plans to hang three new pictures-pictures of her grandchildren and her great-grandson who is yet to be born. And, I have no doubt that such a view will bring her joy and comfort. To hear her describe it brought me joy. Her face just lit up in anticipation.

So, until we join the Church Triumphant, and enjoy the hospitality of heaven, we can so order our lives and homes, even if they are a room in a nursing home, to be a foretaste of what is yet to come.

May it be so for all of us. Amen.

*Hymn 361 Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation, verses 3 and 4

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p. 35

*Hymn 580 Gloria Patri

Joys and Concerns of the Church
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn 462 I Love to Tell the Story

*Blessing

Just as God's Word was sent into the world to heal and redeem,
so God sends you into the world this day
to be light and love, healing and hope.

Go now, and share the good news generously,
and may the grace of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you today and always. Amen.

*Postlude

Announcements

Thanks to all who came out yesterday for the spring work party. Many hands make light work!

The session meets today following worship.

As we approach the end of the school year, let us be aware that the need for food increases for many families. Please support local ministries that provide help for those in need. (See insert)

(shower announcement)