

House of Hope - John 14: 1-14 and I Peter 2: 2-10

Home is very important for everyone.

We all share the desire to find our way home, whether it's at the end of a long day or at the end of a long journey, a long time of wandering, of alienation, of homesickness and pain. Home ... it is very important for everyone.

The image in John 14: 2,3 speaks of a location 'a place', 'my Father's house' and 'many dwelling places'.

We must ask, "What is the Father's house?" Most of us take this to mean heaven, for heaven is usually viewed as the place where God dwells, but "heaven" is a very uncertain term. If we let Scripture interpret Scripture, we would perhaps refer to a passage in the last chapter of Isaiah, where God says, "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool," (Isaiah 66:1).

This implication is clear that God dwells in the entire universe; that this vast cosmos, of which we are but a tiny part, is the Father's house. "In it," Jesus declares, "are many rooms." The word in Greek for "rooms" really means 'a place to live.' What Jesus therefore is saying is, "In my Father's house there are many homes, many places to live."

The language about going to prepare dwelling places in the Father's house implies the understanding of journey and the exclusiveness of Jesus to the Father. The knowledge Jesus is the knowledge of the Father; the seeing of Jesus is the seeing of the Father.

What often creates uneasiness among many people is the exclusiveness of Jesus' revelation to the Father. 'No one comes to the Father except through me' (14: 6). I think, this statement is not primarily about the moral superiority over others, but in its confession of and commitment to Jesus as the only way to the Father. The real issue here is not so much about whether non - Christian people are saved, but whether people who called themselves as Christians have any sense of their distinctiveness. How our confession and commitment to Christ help us to reclaim its unique identity.

Meanwhile, the passage in I Peter is also an introduction to the notion of the household of God. In verse 5 it says 'spiritual house'. The household code of 2: 18-3: 7 underscores the importance of this motif, as does the use of the household of God.

Understanding Jesus as the living stone, believers are also to see themselves as living stones, whom God builds into a single, spiritual house. Again, like Jesus, these stones will be rejected by unbelievers, by the world at large, but will be affirmed by God.

Today's readings also focus on trust in a time of turmoil. Trusting God's care in challenging times is not only the source of hope but also creative transformation.

Confident that God is with us in all the seasons of life, we can reach out in mission to others despite our own difficulties.

The words of I Peter 2:2-10 describe the impact of experiencing God's mercy on the Christian community. Grace and mercy lead to lives of integrity and growth. Followers of Christ long for spiritual food and are no longer content with the values of this world.

That may be why so many people speak of finding a church "home" - when they find a congregation that welcomes them and feels like a place in which they can grow their faith. Of course, if a church only makes us comfortable with our lives as they are, our presuppositions and our compromises in faith, then perhaps we are speaking of accommodation rather than challenge and growth. Nevertheless, for many people, finding a church home means finding a safe haven, a fortress, and a rock.

The church may be the one way that they experience God's protective love in a hostile and dangerous world. It's in that safe haven that we receive, like little babies, the spiritual milk that we need to grow our faith. We ourselves become part of the very "structure," the home, the spiritual house that First Peter speaks of. If we remember that his audience was a group of dispossessed people, people who had no unifying dignity and identity apart from being a church, the power of these words expands in our hearing.

Can we imagine being "no people" and then becoming "God's people"? Have you ever felt like a "nobody" and then a "somebody"? Have you ever felt outside and alone, and then part of something greater than yourself?

The implication is live in full life, nourished life. Life filled with life giving is God's intention and gift through Jesus. This life is productive, it brings forth fruit in producing life-giving resources for others.

The Christian life is a life of continual conversion and nurture; of growth and regrowth, within the life-giving relationship to Jesus - that is the community of faith.

I believe that our church is called to be a safe haven, a refuge, a place of dignity and identity for those who seek a church home, with beliefs, stories, sufferings, and joys experiences.

May God, in God's infinite wisdom and love, grant to us all such love and generosity of Spirit that we may know and continue to seek God's loving guidance, strength and peace for one another, and God's vision and ministry in the world for which Christ died.