

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas - May 10, 2020 - Home
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 and John 14:1-14

Last Sunday was beautiful. The temperature that day topped out at 78 degrees. So I took that opportunity to pot some annuals. As you may recall, the rest of the week was not nearly as pleasant. We've experienced 50s, 40s, even low 30s. My annuals are now hidden beneath thick, black bags, seeing the light of day just long enough for the occasional watering. Here we are in May, with flowers budding and bursting as a blast of cold air has come and dwelled among us, even daring to shower us with a dusting of snow that we hope will serve as the last gasp of winter.

Even in the presence of Easter, winter lingers. We still feel the chill of quarantine and illness, of joblessness and uncertainty. So when those precious moments of light break through the clouds, we don't hesitate to enjoy it. Thursday afternoon was the warmest this week, with temperatures in the upper 60s. So when my wife came home from work late that afternoon, I invited her and the boys to our garage.

"Let's show Mom what we got her for Mother's Day," I said. "Yeah," yelled Nathan, our youngest child, as he sprung to his feet and raced toward the basement. "Let's see what we got her." I have now been a father long enough to know better

than to let a four-year-old in on a secret. And with a new mystery to be solved, Nathan was determined to arrive first on the scene so that he could make the big announcement.

Our garage, as I imagine is true of many others in the COVID-19 era, is a storage facility for recent purchases. It's the first stop in the sanitation process. And there, Nathan found it. Not the actual Mother's Day present, but the largest package in view. With excitement, he raced back through the basement and yelled, "Happy Mother's Day, Mommy! We got you toilet paper!" He then quickly leaned toward me and whispered, "Dad, did we get her toilet paper for Mother's Day?" "No," I said, smiling and trying not to laugh, before going to the corner of the garage and pulling a large box from a black bag.

I don't always select the best gifts. My wife can attest to that. But, in a world of face masks, hand sanitizers, and toilet paper, this one did the trick. It doesn't hurt that my wife had dropped a hint recently. But this year, in particular, I get it. There is something about a hammock that captures the moment. Encouraging us to stop and pause for a while. Beckoning us to smell the roses. Inviting us to hear the sound of birds chirping, to grab a good book and a favorite drink. To be at peace and to know that when the sun chooses to shine again, we will be ready to savor it.

Amid these uncertain times, many among us are fearful. Fearful about our health - both physical and emotional. Fearful about our job security and our financial resources. Fearful about the education of our children, about extended periods of isolation, and about the possibility of dying alone. Amid all of this stress, we gladly receive the invitation to be at peace. And, in doing so, we stand on very firm theological footing.

For “when facing what is ahead, Jesus embodies peace and courage.”¹ During the last week of his life, he knew what was coming. And as a result, he was in full preparation mode. Yet, as one preparing to die, he did some very curious things. It was then that he washed his disciples’ feet before encouraging them to go and do likewise. It was then when he forgave a traitor. And it was then that he gave the commandment to love, even as he proclaimed that a close friend would deny him. These are not the actions of a man who was living in fear, but rather, the manifestations of God’s mercy for a world that was living in fear.

¹ Lindsay P. Armstrong, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year A, Volume 2*. Ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press: 2019), Pg. 269.

Today, as I reflect on Jesus' selflessness, I do so in a moment set aside for honoring and remembering the special women in our lives. And so, I recall my own upbringing, feeling exceedingly grateful to have been raised by healthy, supportive parents. For me, home was not a place of fear and uncertainty, but one of stability and boundless love.

Perhaps, this is why today's gospel lesson resonates so well with me. When Jesus says, "I go to prepare a place for you," I get it. Because in my own home, I always knew that I had a place. That I was valued. That I mattered. I recognize how much mothers give of themselves, so I give thanks to the many women out there, much like my own mother, who have done everything in their power to provide a place where life may flourish.

As Christians, too, we know that home is far more expansive than where we lay our heads at night. And we celebrate the work that God is accomplishing through us. Lindsay Armstrong writes that "We do not understand what Jesus means when he says, 'In my Father's house there are many dwelling places' (John 14:2), until we make room for placeless people: international students, internally displaced persons, refugees, unhoused people, Dreamers, addicts, differently abled people, foster

children, domestic-abuse victims, ignored or abused elderly folks, among too many others.”²

When Jesus says, “I go to prepare a place for you,” he isn’t just speaking to us. No. His is a universal message which draws us in and reminds us to go and do likewise. For the place that Jesus has prepared is where “unexpected people become family.”³

Friends, I invite you to think about that for a moment. To consider our own congregation. The variety of experiences, and backgrounds, and opinions. The multitude of gifts, and skills, and abilities that are found in this family of faith. Remarkably, we share this collective diversity as one body. And we joyfully proclaim that in God’s house, there is a place for everyone.

In this moment, as COVID-19 upends everything, the concept of place is evolving. As a result, we are searching diligently not only for our place but also for what it means to be the church amid a global pandemic. And in the current context,

² Armstrong, 269.

³ Armstrong, 270.

we are right to ask how we might help others find family and place in the household of God. Yes. “For whom do we create home” now? ⁴

Even in the midst of uncertainty, Jesus beckons his disciples to follow him, saying, “You know the way to the place where I am going.” And when their eyes are opened, they will follow him home. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.

⁴ Armstrong, 270.