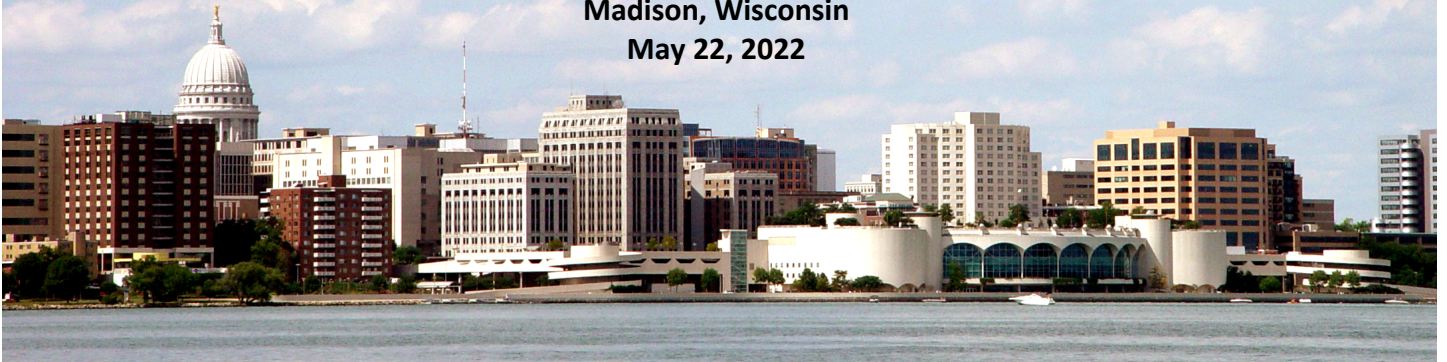


Comfort for Troubled Hearts

JOHN 14:1-6 • PART 2: A PLACE PREPARED

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It is good to see all of you here this morning! If you are not familiar with our order of worship, you might want to know that we plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper right after we study God's word; so, if you do not yet have the elements for the Lord's Supper, this would be a great time to get those from the table in the entryway. Unfortunately for us, today is the last day for Clayton, and Alannah, and Soren to be with us for a while. They are headed to Tennessee due to a new job opportunity and so that Clayton can continue his education down there. We do wish you guys well, we are praying for a smooth transition, and we do hope that you make your way back north at some point in the future!

We are starting our study of God's word this morning with the reminder that God loves us, and he has provided a way for all of us to be saved. This is the good news, that Jesus the Son of God came to this world to give his life on the cross. He was buried, and then he came back from the dead on the third day. We respond to this good news by obeying it – we believe it, we make a decision to turn away from sin, and we then obey his command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. This is the point at which our sins are covered by his blood, and we are born into God's family.

The picture on the wall comes to us from Adolome Isaac who preaches in Uganda (in east-central Africa). Several days ago, he posted online and says,

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ which I proclaim because it's the power of God to save mankind (Romans 1:16). Today when I went to Mooni to proclaim the Truth about Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord God hooked one soul from darkness into the light which is in Jesus Christ. Sister Nansubuga Silvia today took the right decision in obeying the Gospel through water baptism for the remission of her sins, as it's written in Acts of the Apostles 22:16. This evening, after a long interaction with them in the group, one of the Muslim men also got involved in sharing, but the Lord showed His true light to Nansubuga Silvia from Masaka. We thank God so much for her wonderful decision to the word of God, and may you all my brethren continue focusing on the Lord till He comes and be Blessed.

What I love about this is the simplicity of the gospel message. After everything the Lord has done for us, all it takes on our part is an open Bible and a pool of water somewhere. I have never been to Uganda, chances are I

will never make it to Uganda, but it is so awesome to see God working in such a far-off place. And we certainly pray for our new sister, Nansubuga Silvia, as she begins the Christian life this week. If you have any interest at all in following her example, we encourage you to get in touch.

Several days ago, one of the men of the congregation texted with what seemed to be a rather urgent sermon request. The message said, "There is too much hatred in this world. Can you preach about LOVE on Sunday?" He didn't explain further, but the message came right after the news of a mentally unstable man killing several people in a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, in what seems to be a racially-motivated attack. For a moment, I thought about leaving our series on John 14, but then I realized that the passage we are scheduled to study this morning is John 14:2, where Jesus promises to prepare a place for us – obviously, a place where there will be no more hate, no more crying, or mourning or pain, so I decided that it might be best to continue on as planned, with a reminder that this world is not our permanent home.

Not long after this, I saw an update from the Christian Chronicle, indicating that the manager of the store in Buffalo is actually a member of the Lord's church, a Christian brother, by the name of Patrick Patterson. Patrick, a 65-year-old member of the Linwood Church of Christ in Buffalo, was working in the back room when the shooting began. At first, he thought kids were playing with starter pistols, but when people started running toward him in fear, he then realized that the shooting was real, and brother Patrick started getting people out the back of the store. He says, "As a manager, you kind of recognize your responsibility toward your coworkers and toward the customers." He waited for the gunfire to stop and went back a second time, knowing that that decision could have led to his last breath. Others helped as well, including William Grigas, an employee at the store who was also a member of the Linwood congregation who was recently baptized. Linwood's minister, Lennie Swain, called to make sure his members were alright and ultimately describes Patterson's actions as "courageous." He says, "I also think that by God's providential care, he was in the right place at the right time." He reassures the church that God is in control, and he says that "...we should pray for that situation, pray for the young man that caused the situation and pray for the people who were injured in that awful event." Patterson's preacher then says that we do not know what day will be our last or what hour. Patterson himself says that being a Christian and having good priorities as a man of God gave him the strength to do what he did. He said he wants others to know that everyone should prepare to meet their God because no one knows what day or hour will be their last. Then (in this article), he quotes John 14:2 (from the King James Version), ***"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."*** He then says that "heaven is a prepared place for prepared people." How amazing! We have a special request for a lesson on this, and a member of the Lord's church who was involved in helping people through this event quotes the exact verse that we were already planning on studying this morning.

This morning, then, we return to this series of lessons on what is perhaps one of the most encouraging passages anywhere in the New Testament. As we look to Jesus to calm our troubled hearts, we return to Jesus' words to his disciples on the night before he dies. If you are not there already, I would invite you to turn with me to John 14 (p. 1684). As we noted last week, the context is that the disciples are troubled. Jesus has predicted that one of them would betray him, he's explained that he is about to leave them, and he also says that Peter will deny him three times that very night. These men are ***"troubled."***

Last week, by the way, we noted that to be ***"troubled"*** is to be ***"stirred up,"*** and I briefly referred to my daughter's fish that had just survived the nearly 650-mile trip back home from Tennessee in a plastic cup. I do need to point out today that Kiki the fish is completely fine! No animals were harmed in the preparation of last week's lesson! Kiki the fish is all good – living proof that being ***"troubled"*** is not necessarily the end of the road!

But, back to our passage in John 14: In response to the disciples being **“stirred up”** over everything, Jesus starts by saying, **“Let not your hearts be troubled.”** In other words: Stop it! And then he gives a series of statements intended to comfort his disciples, starting with the first one last week, as Jesus says, **“Believe in God, believe also in Me.”** When our hearts are stirred up, Jesus reminds us to put our faith in him. We study his word, we spend time with his people, we put our faith in him, and Jesus has a way of calming our hearts. This morning, let’s return to John 14:1-6. We will look at the passage again, and then I’d like for us to spend some time looking at a second comforting statement in this passage. This is John 14:1-6, where Jesus says,

¹ “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³ If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

This morning, I’d like for us to focus in on a second comforting statement, and this one is found in verse 2, as Jesus promises a prepared place. And this will be our emphasis this morning – we will take a few moments to think about the place he promises, and then we will focus in on the fact that he has promised to prepare this place for us.

I. But first of all, as we think about this prepared place that’s been promised to us here, let’s focus on the PLACE itself.

At the beginning of verse 2, Jesus says, **“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places.”** And I want us to focus, first, here on the fact that Jesus refers to his **“Father’s house.”** For most of us, that is a very comforting picture, isn’t it? I know that not all of you have had a good relationship with your fathers, but generally speaking, there is some comfort in this statement. For many years, my parents lived down in Crystal Lake, Illinois, and I knew that I would always be welcome **“in my father’s house.”** Of course, there was the incident. We were on our way back to Wisconsin from Tennessee in the days before cell phones, and instead of stopping and wasting money on a hotel, we decided to drive through the night. We got to my parents’ house at 4 or 5 in the morning, and our plan was to use a spare key to let ourselves in. They had two phone lines at that time, and we were going to use the line in the kitchen to call the other line to let them know, “Hey, we are here a bit early.” I wisely let my wife go in first, very quietly. Everything was going well, until my dad appeared out of the darkness with a weapon, demanding to know who was there! So, there are some exceptions to being welcomed in your father’s house, but generally speaking, most of us are comfortable going home. In fact, if I had a friend passing through the Chicago area, perhaps passing through O’Hare airport, I know that I could have offered them a place to stay back in those days – phone first, don’t sneak in at 4 a.m., and all that, but my father would have honored that invitation. Perhaps in a similar way, Jesus seems to be offering an invitation on behalf of his father. And so, when our hearts are stirred up, the Lord invites us to think about this invitation.

As we think about the place Jesus is inviting us to here, I hope we also notice how he describes it as a place of **“many dwelling places.”** As we just briefly noted earlier, the King James Version refers to **“mansions”** in this passage. Of course, when we think of **“mansions,”** we think of large and luxurious homes, the “governor’s mansion,” for example. And sometimes we sing about this, don’t we?

I'm satisfied with just a cottage below
A little silver and a little gold
But in that city where the ransomed will shine

I want a gold one that's silver lined

Don't think me poor or deserted or lonely
I'm not discouraged I'm heaven bound
I'm but a pilgrim in search of the city
I want a mansion, a harp and a crown

I've got a mansion just over the hilltop
In that bright land where we'll never grow old
And some day yonder we will never more wander
But walk on streets that are purest gold

And yes, it is a beautiful picture. However, the word Jesus uses here more accurately and very simply refers not to a **“mansion,”** but to an **“abode,”** a place to live, a room. And truly, it doesn't really make sense to think of **“many mansions”** inside of a house, does it? More accurately, then, Jesus says that in his Father's house are **“many dwelling places, many rooms, many places to stay.”** So, this isn't really about **“mansions.”** The point here isn't that we will be living in a house that's lined with silver and gold. The point here isn't that we will be walking around on streets that are purest gold, but the point is that we will be welcomed into the Father's house. And the point is that there is room for us in this house. This house has **“many rooms.”** Back in this culture, when kids grew up and got married, they would often simply build on to the family home. They would add a room. When other kids grew up and got married, they would tack on another room. And when their kids got married, they would add another room, and so on, until you had something like a family “compound,” as we might describe it – a home surrounded by little apartments, perhaps arranged around a central courtyard of some kind.

Maybe you've noticed in the news recently that Madison is in the process of updating its zoning to allow more of what I've usually heard described as “mother-in-law apartments,” or maybe “granny flats,” or perhaps “backyard cottages.” I think the zoning now officially refers to “accessory dwelling units.” They're talking about finished basements, or maybe a room over a garage, or perhaps a tiny house in the backyard, or maybe finishing a detached garage as living space. To help combat the housing crisis, the city seems to at least be trying to loosen some rules to allow adding on in various ways so that more people can live on the same property. That's what Jesus is referring to here. In his Father's house are many **“dwelling places,”** in his Father's house are many “accessory dwelling units.”

So, let's think about the combination: We have many dwelling places inside our Father's house. In terms of calming our troubled hearts, then, Jesus is saying that no matter what comes next, we have a permanent place to stay. There is no housing crisis. There is no chance of being permanently homeless. But instead, we have a promise from Jesus that we will be welcomed into his Father's house, a giant family gathered together in one place, all living together – in many rooms, but all together at home in the Father's house.

And Jesus says, **“If it were not so, I would have told you.”** In other words, he's telling the truth here. He's not out to deceive them or trick them, but this is what he has promised. First of all, then, to comfort his disciples, Jesus explains that in his Father's house are many dwelling places.

II. Secondly, though, Jesus also says **FOR I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU.**

There are two references to this – once here in verse 2 and again in verse 3. When I was younger, I was thinking that maybe heaven wasn't quite done yet. He got the concrete and the framing all done, but then he had to

interrupt his work to come to earth, and now he needs to go back to finish things up. Maybe there's some trim work still to do, or maybe the paint and carpet wasn't done, he needs to move in the furniture and make the beds, he needs to sweep out the sawdust and do one more cleaning before the final walk-through. However, now that I am older and wiser, I'm thinking: Maybe that's not it! We think of Matthew 25:34, where Jesus has the King saying to those on his right, ***"Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*** The kingdom itself, has already been prepared. What, then, is lacking? I would suggest that at this moment in John 14, the only thing left to prepare is the WAY to the Father's house. So, maybe, just maybe, this has more to do with the "way" than it has to do with the place itself.

And we will get back to the "way" in a couple of weeks, but it is interesting how Jesus says that he must ***"go"*** to do what needs to be done here. Twice in the book of Hebrews, Jesus is referred to as the ***"author"*** of our faith (Hebrews 2:10 and Hebrews 12:2). Some translations refer to Jesus being the ***"founder"*** or ***"pioneer"*** of our faith. The word refers to someone who is a ***"trailblazer,"*** to someone who "goes first," the guy with a machete chopping a way through the jungle so that others can follow. To blaze a trail is to mark the trail for others. Way back when, trails were "blazed" by stripping a small piece of bark off a tree so that the lighter color inside the tree would catch your eye against the darker bark of the tree. Today, trails are usually blazed with paint or maybe medallions. Again, we will get back to this in two weeks, but for now, it seems that Jesus isn't necessarily finishing an unfinished project, but he is preparing the way for us to go to this place.

And I say this, because Jesus says he is "going" somewhere to do this. Where is he going? The very next morning, Jesus is going to the cross. He is going to blaze a trail to his Father's house, making a way for the disciples to follow. We might think of Exodus 23:20-22, with reference to the Promised Land, where God said to Moses, ***"Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries."*** Perhaps in a similar way, Jesus was going to prepare the place for them to go, not in terms of finishing some project that hadn't been finished, but perhaps in terms of preparing the way for them to get to that place, in terms of making the place a possibility for them.

Back in those days, important people would often send somebody ahead to prepare the way – similar to what John the Baptist did for Jesus, similar to what Jesus asked his own disciples to do with the upper room they are sitting in right at this moment – somebody went on ahead to lead the way, to make preparations, to make the way possible. Today, we do much of this ourselves on trips. We research, we check online reviews. I've been doing a lot of this over the past few weeks, getting ready for a trip to Florida this summer. I've been calling ahead, making reservations, getting advice from those who know who are already there. In perhaps a similar way, Jesus is making the journey possible by opening the path.

Perhaps some of you are familiar with the Stewart Tunnel on the Badger State Trail down near Belleville. It's closed for repairs right now, but the tunnel was started in 1886 and completed in 1888, providing a rail link between Madison and Freeport, Illinois. I've biked through it a few times. It's about 17 miles south of our house on the southwest side of Madison. It's a quarter of a mile long, with a slight curve in it so you cannot see light from one end to the other. But the tunnel is named for James Stewart of Pennsylvania, who was the contractor for the project. Mr. Stewart was thrown from a buggy and killed while he was following the proposed route of the new railroad and the tunnel was named in his memory. In a sense, Mr. Stewart blazed a trail. He gave his

life, making future travel possible. And that's what Jesus is about to do by going to the cross, preparing a way for us to get to those many rooms in his Father's house. It's what the author of Hebrews refers to in Hebrews 10:20, with reference to the blood of Jesus. He refers to **"a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh."** Jesus makes a way. Jesus, then, is leaving, not to get away from his disciples, but he is leaving to get things ready for them.

Conclusion:

This morning, we have looked at a place prepared. When our hearts are troubled, the Lord says, first of all, in this passage, **"Believe in Me."** And then he gives the reminder, **"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you."** What a comforting thought! When our hearts are troubled, when we look around us at all of the hate in this world, we look to Jesus and we remember that he has prepared a place for us in his Father's house, a place where there will be no more mourning, or crying, or pain, because the disappointments of this life will have passed away.

I'm looking forward to coming back to this passage next week as we continue looking at Jesus' advice for bringing comfort to troubled hearts. For the rest of our time together today, we will be singing songs about this place he has prepared for us.

Before we continue with singing and the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are a God of both justice and mercy. You sent Jesus to this earth to make a way for us to be saved, and we are in awe of your plan. Thank you, Father, for loving us.

Father, we ask that you be with us this week, reminding us through your word to react with love whenever our hearts are stirred up and troubled. Be with our Christian family in Buffalo as they reach out with the love of your Son and as they help their community to heal. Be with us. Often, we do not react as we should. We pray for wisdom and strength. The evil one tries to get us to focus on all of the drama and conflict we see around us. Today, though, we look to Jesus for peace, knowing that he has prepared a place for us.

We come to you in the name of your son Jesus. Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com