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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fifth Sunday of Easter (Series A)

May 18, 2014

Text: John 14:1–14

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus' disciples are nervous, maybe even a bit frightened and confused. They were celebrating the Passover feast. It should have been a joyous occasion but Jesus was talking about someone betraying Him, about Peter denying Him, about the need for Christ's Church to love one another even as the Lord loves them. This wasn't how the Passover was supposed to be celebrated. And the Lord had already changed the Passover liturgy by taking bread and declaring it to be His true body. In addition, the Lord took the cup of blessing and declared the wine to be His true blood. Eating and drinking His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins was to continue until the End of time, not the Passover, but the Lord's Supper.

Betrayal and denial contrasted with a fellowship of love and a new but perpetual meal of forgiveness is certainly cause for confusion and fear. Jesus knows where His troubled disciples are and so He says, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me" (vs. 1). It's as if Jesus were reminding His disciples who He is. I am the Son of the Father. Don't forget Me.

Those are most important words for us to remember. The things that trouble our hearts may in fact be different than those troubling the disciples. But we have troubled hearts; at one time or another, fear and anxiety afflict us.

The comfort Jesus desires to give to His beloved people is more substantial and true than mere religious feelings or ecstatic spiritual experiences. Listen to what the God's Son says in vs. 2, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (vs. 2). We Christians have a divine destination that transcends the afflictions and anxieties of this world; the Father's house. We aren't blind to the events of the world and our own homes. But our hearts and souls yearn for something greater for we were created for something

greater. We've been redeemed by the blood of Jesus; something more glorious awaits us.

Jesus continues (vs. 3), "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Jesus has prepared a place for each of us in heaven. But did you notice where in heaven? In the very place where Jesus is!! Sometimes I hear folks say, "I don't care where I stay in heaven just as long as I get there." I certainly understand what people mean by this. But Jesus promises us something much greater. Our place is in the Father's house where Jesus is. We're not going to live in heaven's suburb, but in the royal palace itself. Wherever Jesus is, that's where you'll be. "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

Consider that for a moment, dear saints of God. Jesus is preparing a place for you, with you in mind! Tract housing and one-size-fits all type living arrangements aren't what Jesus has in mind. As the Lord knows and calls us each by name so He prepares our eternal future with each of us in mind. And within these uniquely prepared rooms, we will live out eternity together as one, holy people of God, fulfilling God's design and intentions for humanity from the very beginning. At the center of it all, will be Jesus. He's the desire of all nations; the goodness, truth, and beauty that fires and invigorates our heart, body, and mind.

This deep-seated longing for the presence of Jesus makes us Christians rather unique. We were created for life in this world. And our heavenly Father has given us various vocational callings and relationship that truly divine gifts: family, friends, neighbors, the joy of this good creation and so forth. And yet, we long for a greater experience that cannot be fulfilled in this world. The psalmist, so many centuries ago, describes it like this, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2).

What's most glorious for us is that we know the way to the Father's house so that we may appear before God. Jesus again, "And you know the way to where I am going" (vs. 4). We aren't left in the dark. The way is laid out before all people. It's really quite simple. Jesus has prepared our place in His Father's house in advance. The path Jesus traveled is also our, the path of death and resurrection.

Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, wasn't so sure that everything was as clear-cut as Jesus made it out to be. Look at vs. 5, "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'" Somehow Thomas didn't understand that Jesus is going back to the Father. That's the "where." And Thomas didn't understand the "how" of Jesus' return.

Jesus' answer to Thomas' question is one of the most important statements in the Bible. It describes Christianity's essential nature and character. Many of you may even have this verse memorized, and for good reason (vs. 6–7), "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' If you had known me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you know him and have seen him." The "where" and the "how" in Thomas' question find their answer. Jesus will return to His Father who sent Him in love and grace to save the world from sin, Satan, and death. How Jesus will return to the Father will be made clear through the events of Good Friday, Easter, and the Ascension. It is that path through death, resurrection and ascension that we Christians must follow if we are to reach the place prepared for us in heaven.

All access to God the Father is located in Jesus. He alone is the way to the Father. All the talk you here about many ways to God, many religions leading to the same destination is utter nonsense. The way to eternal life is as narrow and specific as one Man who died a specific death and rose again on a specific day. The only truth about God the Father is revealed in that Man. The only life that gives eternal life is that which is found in that Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. I am the way, the truth, and the life, says Jesus. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

That longing we feel in our own hearts and minds and which was so powerfully described by the psalmist only finds its fulfillment in Jesus. Through baptism into Christ, we follow the same path of death, resurrection, and glorification. The answer to Thomas' questions finds its most concrete expression in our lives through baptism. When water is applied in God's Trinitarian name, we are baptized into the death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus. Day by day, our sins are drowned through baptismal repentance so that day by day our new man, created after the image and likeness of Jesus, may arise and live before God in righteousness and purity. That is the way, the truth, and the life we follow.

It is the only way given to us for it was the only path given to Jesus by His Father. On the resurrection of the Last Day, this specific way, truth, and life will reach its climax

and destination. And we shall live in the rooms prepared for us by Jesus in both body and soul. This promise, this ultimate hope gives peace to troubled hearts says Jesus. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."

[St. John's] It is not without reason that the first question our catechumens will be asked is "Do you this day in the presence of God and of this congregation acknowledge the gifts that God gave you in your Baptism?" The gifts given to our confirmands are the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal life. They are following the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus. This path leads them to confess anew their desire to renounce the devil, his works and ways and follow Jesus in accordance to the teaching of Holy Scripture. They will receive today, for the first time but not the last, the body and blood of Jesus so that they can walk in fellowship with our Lord and also with us. The longing of our heart and mind to be with Jesus finds expression and fulfillment in the gifts given to us today. Jared, Sammy, and Timothy we rejoice with you today.

Christ has gone before us and has prepared the way. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Where Jesus is, there we shall be also. That is the glorious future that awaits us all.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.