

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 7
REJOICING IN HAVING A DWELLING PLACE WITH GOD

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14.1-3).

"Do not let your hearts be troubled" ...some commentators suggest that the translation of "hearts" is incorrect, that it should read "heart", singular not plural. The "your" is plural, "heart" is singular, suggesting the disciples are all of one heart in Christ Jesus.

This text is a paradox: Jesus addresses his disciples with words comforting to us, but perhaps were not quite as comforting to the original hearers. It is part of Jesus' farewell address as John constructs his Gospel. His disciples' hearts are troubled. Jesus is seeking to reassure his disciples that despite his leaving, God's presence and presents continue with them.

This week I invite you to rejoice in how you have a dwelling place in God...

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 8
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Jesus also shares, *"Believe in God, believe also in me"* (John 14.1a). Interesting language, to "believe...in me (Jesus)". To believe in something is to dwell in that something, to embody it. To believe is to commit oneself to being whole and complete in head and in heart.

I find it interesting how the word "believe" is so closely related to "be-live, or be-living". To truly believe is to be-living authentically what we have accepted and adopted as a belief. Otherwise we are a hypocrite, one of Jesus' favorite terms for those who act as if behind a mask (the root term meaning of hypocrite in Greek).

To be living in a faithful way means to be living-acting out-what one believes. Jesus is saying good-bye to his disciples, to those whom he has entrusted with his words and his ways. As he does so, he invites them to continue to believe, to be-living in him, by witnessing with a heart that is filled with grace not gravity, faith not fear, with a love that is faith-fully indwelling.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 9

REJOICING IN HAVING A DWELLING PLACE IN GOD

"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places...". How many times have you heard those words spoken at funeral or memorial services? It is ironic, in a way, that these words which are shared to bring comfort to those who are grieving might not have been comforting to Jesus' disciples when the words were originally addressed to them.

How many places have you dwelled in your life? How many homes, apartments, dorm rooms, or abodes have you listed as an address? What is the largest dwelling you have ever been within? How many rooms did it have?

What is the largest dwelling you have ever lived in? Have you had the privilege of living in a home that was newly constructed or a home that was passed down in your family? Of the places you have lived in, what is a favorite? I invite you to go there, to a room in that home, and remember the place and space. Now let your imagination imagine a place where God has reserved everyone a dwelling place.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 10

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"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places...". What would that look like? The largest palace in the world is in Bruni and it takes up 2.15 million square feet with 1788 rooms. (By comparison, Hearst Castle in California is a mere 68,500 square feet with 115 rooms). And God promises even more, according to Jesus, a dwelling place for every person who trusts in God in the person of Jesus.

A mansion, by its English definition, is "a large dwelling house" from the Latin word "mansio" meaning "dwelling", a derivative of "to dwell". How many rooms would that "mansion" have to have? Is there a need for bedrooms, bathrooms, rooms of any kind? This is what Jesus promises, that for every single disciple of Jesus there is a place, a dwelling place for them with God.

And for you, does this promise bring you comfort? Having heard the words expressed at times when comfort was needed (funerals, memorial services), does the promise that there are many dwelling places in God's house bring you comfort?

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 11
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The Gospel writer John quotes Jesus as sharing further: "If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (John 14.1-3). It's not only that there is a dwelling place, but that Jesus goes ahead of the disciples to prepare a place for them.

When and where has someone prepared a place for you? Do you travel, and when you do, do you stay in hotels/motels/rental homes? If so, someone, in the former cases a member of the staff, in the later case the owner of the home or an agency, has prepared the place for you. Such preparations might include all kinds of acts of hospitality.

How does it strike your ear that Jesus goes to prepare a place for you? Or do you assume that Jesus is speaking about, or two, someone else, anyone else? Do you feel honored? Worthy? Unworthy? The "you" here is personal, whether it is individual or plural. "I go to prepare a place for you" Jesus is remembered as saying.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 12
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What do you hear when Jesus is quoted as saying, "And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself..." How do you hear the "if"? Do you hear it as a possibility or a certainty? What if we were to hear the "if" as a "since", since in both Greek and English, the word can be translated so?

Thus when Jesus says "since" he goes to prepare a place for you he means certainty, not possibility. Jesus is departing. He is saying goodbye. While the disciples will be comforted by the Paraclete, John's understanding of the Holy Spirit, he will not be present. Until, as he says, he comes to receive them unto themselves at some point in the future, upon their death or upon his return.

Certainty, not possibility. Of what are you certain, absolutely certain, regarding your life? Of this you can trust: Jesus has gone on to prepare a place for you and that there is room for you, and for me.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 13
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"And (since) I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14.3). According to John, the disciples have spent at least three years being with Jesus as his friends, and co-laborers on behalf of God. And now he is departing (going).

Three years of sharing joys and disappointments, witnessing Jesus perform signs that expressed God's presence and presents. John's Gospel is written decades later, when Jesus' departure is no longer a promise but part of the past.

When have you had an experience of sharing life and love with another person only to have it end so quickly? School? Work? A personal relationship? Then what? Jesus acknowledges that he is leaving, but also not abandoning those whom he has loved in God's name. He will return and take them unto himself, so that where he is, they may also be, as he goes to prepare a dwelling place with God for them.

Thank you for rejoicing with me this week in the reality of how we have a dwelling place with God...