

## A PREPARED PLACE

*“I go to prepare a place for you.”* John 14:2

When Effie and I married our first place of residence was a one room efficiency apartment on the seminary campus that had a small bathroom and a tiny nook for a two burner stove and a miniature refrigerator. The only furniture was a small unfinished round table with fold down leaves on two sides and two matching chairs and a hide-a-bed couch that was situated on the wall opposite the entrance door opening into a communal hall leading to several other identical apartments.

At night the leaves on the table were folded down and it and the two chairs were moved against the wall to give room for the bed to be fully extended. When I came home from work late at night I cautiously felt my way in the dark trying not to wake Effie. The accommodations were sufficient for the time, but they were little more than a room in a dormitory. Certainly it was woefully lacking in space for an expanding family. Later, with the imminent appearance of our first child, we were granted a larger apartment though it too was deficient in many ways.

When seminary days were completed and I began a pastoral ministry we were provided more accommodating living arrangements. Through the years as places of ministry changed we moved numerous times. Housing was often provided, but at times we had the option of choosing our residence from the generic housing available in the area. Although most places of abode were adequate for our needs, none really provided all we wished for.

I yearned for adequate surrounding space where I could be away from the close scrutiny of neighbors and church members who found it convenient to drop in when they came early for services or to stop by unannounced and covertly report to others the state of the house provided by the church and its occupants.

The day came when it was necessary to consider where we would live in retirement. At the time we were living in church housing which would have to be vacated upon my retirement. We owned a house situated upon a number of acres in which we had twice lived briefly during the years of ministry. It was a possibility. But it seemed that neither of us wanted to spend our final years in it.

During one of our conversations I asked Effie if she would like for us to build a retirement home. Her eyes lit up as she emphatically exclaimed “yes”. As the time for retirement neared, she from the educational system, and me from what I assumed would be my last public ministry, she avidly looked over house pictures and plans. Finally choosing one she made changes to adapt it to her wishes.

A master builder was enlisted to bring her dream to a reality. He was known not only for the quality of his work, but also as one who might make changes to the design as a cost cutting measure. He was instructed that under no circumstances was he to change the plans without approval from Effie. We invoked that requirement on several occasions as construction went forward. The house, christened “*Casa de Abuela*” on “*Podder’s Place*” by our grandchildren, was completed on time to be ready for our move.

As we settled in unexpected ministries opened for us that required extensive travel. We made numerous mission trips to Spain aiding in the development of a church near Barcelona where my pastoral experience and Effie’s knowledge of the language and customs of the people facilitated our work. Trips to Scotland further added to our travels.

While on mission we were comfortable while living in the homes of the people and receiving their warm and gracious hospitality but we always looked forward to the time when we would return to a special prepared place on Lee acres. Here for eighteen years we treasured together the blessings and goodness of a loving God until Effie made her final move to her heavenly home and into another place prepared for her.

As a person of faith, in my grief I turned to the scriptures which had guided us for so many years. The passage which I had used to comfort many others became more meaningful and real to me. In John 14 as his departure loomed near, Jesus comforted His disciples with a precious promise. “*I go to prepare a place for you.*”

In many years of grief ministry I had stood with people while their grief was overwhelming and silently prayed that I would be given words of comfort for their pain and be able to give assurance as they looked to the future. I had often directed their thoughts to the words of Jesus recorded by John and the promise given to the disciples when his death was imminent and he would no longer be present with them.

He spoke of heaven and the dwelling places found there which were being prepared for them when their sojourn upon this earth was over. Although he was speaking to them as a group, the meaning was for them as individuals. I like to think each abode was being prepared specifically for each who would dwell there throughout eternity. Meanwhile He gave the promise of a Holy Presence coming for their comfort until He came to receive them unto himself.

Late in life while under the control of the Holy Spirit, John wrote in the book of Revelation of a heavenly city with its beauty where all tears are wiped away and sorrow and pain vanquished. Old things have passed away and all things are made new. He reveals a city in its splendor and glory that is beyond human imagination.

Much like our oversight of our retirement home, no cost cutting measures have been taken in the creation of the special place that Christ has prepared for those of us who believe. It has been completed on time and is ready and waiting for us. Oh, what a place that is prepared for those who love him!