



I don't keep a running track of the Scripture texts picked out by family for their loved one's funeral, but I have a feeling the opening paragraph of the Gospel text we have today, is near the top. I, also, don't take the time to ask the family why they picked certain passages. Sometimes they tell me openly: "That was one of her favorites... That's really nice... That sounds like him." Nevertheless, I'm assuming most

mourners, in rather vulnerable states of emotions, appreciate hearing/reading, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." They, also, like the idea of a "dwelling place" prepared for their loved one: that God has them taken care of for all eternity. And yes, quite often, those loved ones, having to deal with funeral home details, luncheon setup, countless calls to make; they can fully relate to the Thomas-line in a way they never envisioned before, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

A high school classmate of mine, and her family, are enduring such a tumultuous journey right now. Just over a week ago, her mother died at home from a massive heart-attack at 56 years young. That's gut-wrenchingly awful enough. That, alone, sets up a ferocious cry to God, "Lord we cannot possibly know where you are going with all this! How can we find the way out of this, to, somehow, go back to where such a woman, who fostered relentless love to us isn't gone anymore?" That's bad enough on its own, to say the least, but add in the COVID-19 reality: no fully-public funeral to help provide some sense of closure, no friends and loved ones coming by to give you a hug with the most compassionate grip imaginable, no opportunity for a packed room to flesh out all the memories possible to make you cry over sorrow, yes, but, also, the ones of laughing so hard that you can't help but cry, all while feeding off the energy of others that you yourself don't have any left to give. "Lord we don't know where you are going, or where you are right now, for that matter. How can we possibly find the way out of all this?"

And yes, to top it all off, today is Mother's Day. This day will never be the same for that family going forward, to put it rather mildly. Granted, this Mother's Day was going to be rather different for many families across the country, with many such families not being able to celebrate it in the "normal" way: not to be in the same room with the mother they wish to honor and extend appreciation. Not to mention, many mothers are living in nursing homes, where only the staff can enter. How can we possibly navigate this virus-defining terrain to still manage to celebrate, to still bring about any kind of joy, even create some new positive memories that will most certainly never be forgotten for many Mother's Days to come?

Nevertheless, Thomas' many-layered-connections line comes in response to Jesus' comforting "Do not let your hearts be troubled" and his holy preparation of dwelling places for the future. It's just... Jesus has a place to go, first, before all that blessed reassurance can come to fruition. Thomas (well, more than likely *none* of the disciples) just isn't exactly sure *where* their Messiah must go, as if all the comings and goings into synagogues and people's homes and everywhere else in between, bringing Good News to life wasn't already enough. Yes, Jesus had more holy work to do not just on a cross of death, but a tomb, where eternal life was about to be prepared, not just for the "normal" or "celebratory" circumstances, but for all of God's children in every possible moment.

There's that other verse that many find rather comforting in the funeral circumstance: "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 14:3); that our Risen Lord is going to make a holy trek back to show our beloved departed the way to the rather lovely dwelling place, to be one with that Resurrected Christ, even in death. However, I, also, like to think Jesus fulfills that blessed reassurance for all of us when he walks out of the tomb (that Easter celebration that is still continuing today, and well, every day throughout this life), and, in doing so, he takes the whole broken-down world into himself that very Resurrection Day; as if we are already one with the death-defeating Christ. And even if we cannot celebrate like we wish, we are still one with him. And even if we cannot be with the ones we love, we are still one with him. Even if death has attempted to define an entire family, or even the whole world for that matter right now, Christ insists on still being divinely etched into our soul, to never be taken away.

Evidently, there are no limits to how this Risen Christ continues to appear, beyond stones removed or through locked-doors to scared-out-of-their-minds disciples. This Lord insists on sticking with followers who don't know where to find him, or where their lives are possibly going at all. This Messiah can even change with the times and show up through computer screens in the faces of smiled-over loved ones and teared-up-in-joy close friends. Regardless of where we find ourselves this day, no matter how frustrating the circumstance, this Lord won't even need to "find" us, because he's already there. He came out of that tomb into the precious dwelling place of our very hearts and made the ultimate holy decision to never ever leave. Thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!