



In my relatively short experience doing this whole pastor thing, this Gospel passage has appeared quite frequently for funerals. When families of loved ones who have died start to plan for the services, it can feel rather intimidating, even a sense of feeling so incredibly lost, trying to figure all the random details with a funeral home and death certificates and social security, not to mention what passage in all of Scripture can encapsulate their cherished deceased. And as they look through some suggestions, the verses that are most often picked by other

grieving families, it may not always be that this John 14 portion speaks to the character of the person, but it gives the siblings, the children, so much comfort to know that God has prepared a room for their beloved one. Amidst their sorrows and exhaustion, the Gospel of the Resurrection comes to life in those very words.

That was the case for a set of parents several years ago, when I met with them around their kitchen table. Unfortunately, this mother and father had to go through what must be the most unbearable pain in having to plan a funeral for their child at just over thirty years of age. It is in those moments that there are no words to match the emotional toll such a family endures. No overused cliché to make them feel better. Understandably so, it was flat-out terrible. And in their pain and anguish, they turned to John 14 for some sense of seemingly impossible comfort. But in my relatively short experience doing this whole pastor thing, I have this feeling that John 14 is not limited to the heavenly realm, but down into this world as well.

The daughter's name was "Cathy." She went through her spells of testing out various drugs and alcohol, to try to find some sense of comfort in her life filled with complications. I did not get to know her much, only in a few instances when she hit absolute rock bottom. Over and over again, she could not find the hope that she desperately yearned for in her relatively short time on earth. And yet, even in "Cathy," I believe that God brought a most precious room of the heavenly mansion to those around her.

Because, although "Cathy" dealt with her fair share of issues, she insisted on taking her siblings on adventures out in nature, as if there was a breath-taking world out there beyond the walls of their home. It continued on with her three boys, as she would not allow them to have their faces buried in cell phones or tablets or television sets, but that they must go out and experience this most awe-inspiring Creation, as if just maybe God had unleashed a glimpse of the heavenly mansion in the trees and fields and waters around us. That we didn't have to wait until a heavenly entrance to experience the breath-taking presence of God.

Yes, as much as "Cathy" struggled to find the hope herself, she still managed to help others experience it. She was one of those naturally talented children of God: able to play the piano and perform ballets without much practice at all. And not only that, she did so with passion, not just to show people she could do such artistry, but with a drive to bring the beauty of God's majesty to life. Even though "Cathy" could never find what she was desperately searching for in this life, I still insist that she was a walking disciple of Christ, one who helped her family and friends see that God's house

is not limited to the heavens, or even inside sanctuary walls, but in a gathering of loved ones, in an open plain surrounded by an active Creation bringing forth new life and serenity that we so often overlook. I insist that even “Cathy” helped us see that we don’t have to wait around for a room prepared on the other side of mortality, but that we are meant to experience God’s hospitality of love and grace and hope in this very life, too.

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places,” so says Jesus. It brings the greatest comfort for so many grieving families facing sadness and exhaustion and everything in between. They may not have the words themselves, including with “Cathy’s” parents, but those words tend to bring some sense of the Gospel they’re desperately searching for during a most unbearable time. That there is, in fact, a dwelling place even for those whose lives were far from the smoothest plain of a journey.

However, I think the ultimate transcending power of the Gospel goes beyond what happens next. I believe the power of the Resurrection is Christ living among us now, going to work in decorating earthly rooms with love and grace of God dwelling with us here now. I think that even with “Cathy,” with her fair share of complications to say the least, Christ brought the Greatest News to life, as if the beauty of God’s dwelling place cannot possibly be limited to some far-off distant heaven, but in all of us, no matter what. As if nothing in this life will ever separate us from God’s love in Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!