

Easter 5A 2017
May 14, 2017
The Rev. Vincent Marinco

“In my Father’s house there are many rooms”

What is God’s house? If we think about it, God’s house is Heaven and Heaven is the whole universe a vast cosmos in which we are a very tiny part. In Greek, the word “room” means, ‘a place to live.’ What Jesus was really saying is that in my father’s house there are many rooms or many places to live.



There were 3 men at the pearly gates waiting to get into Heaven. St. Peter came to let them in and told them to follow him and he would show them where they were going to live in heaven.

As they walked down the main street paved in gold, they passed huge mansions made of brick and stone. Each home had about forty rooms with solid oak woodwork and marble and slate floors. Beautiful gold chandeliers provided the light.

A little further down the street the homes started to get smaller. They were still very large and beautiful with maybe 10 rooms or so and made of brick. St. Peter pointed to one of the men and said this is your home; this is the place that you will live in Heaven. The man happily went inside.

St. Peter and the other two men proceeded down the street. The homes were getting smaller as they went further down the street. Finally, they came to a section of modest wooden homes that were still very nice. Pointing to one of the houses, St. Peter said to the second man, this is going to be your home in Heaven. The second man left and happily went inside.

Now there was just one man and St. Peter walking down the street. The farther they went the worse the houses began to look, and yet they keep walking. Now they were in the slums, tar paper and wooden shacks with one room, and still they keep walking.

Finally they came to a small pile of wood and nails, and St. Peter said to the man, here is where you will live in Heaven. The man was shocked because the other two men had been given wonderful homes to live in. Finally the man asked, why just a small pile of nails and wood, and not a big house like the other two men received? St. Peter replied, “That is all you sent.”

Wow, Our children were with us when we heard this story in church and our son Matthew said, “I am going to be good and send up a lot of wood and nails.”



Jeff Piehler is a retired thoracic surgeon. Now 65 he was diagnosed with incurable Stage 4 prostate cancer 11 years ago. He has tried every conventional treatment and many trial ones. Dr. Piehler is the first to say that he has lived a wonderful life, despite his illness. But he knows his journey is coming to an end –and relatively soon.

So he decided to build his own coffin.

He contacted Peter Smith, a carpenter and artist, who agreed to work with him. The two could not have been more different. Peter's earring, tattoos and free spirit were counterpoint to the physician's proper fussiness.

As they worked together to select the wood, planning and cutting it, fitting the pieces together, and finishing the pine coffin, the two developed a close friendship. They talked about what they wanted to accomplish with the remaining time left in their lives and what they regretted about their past.

Dr. Piehler writes: "We'd made a stunningly beautiful pine box, and a stunningly beautiful friendship. But we knew neither could last, that was the reason to celebrate them."

"Something else happened, too. The project smoothed the edges of my thoughts. It's pretty much impossible to feel anger at someone driving too slowly in front of you when you've just come from sanding your own coffin. Coveting material objects, holding onto old grudges, failing to pause and see the grace in strangers are all equally foolish. While the coffin is a reminder of what awaits us all, its true message is to live each moment to its greatest potential."

Jesus told his disciples that he was going ahead to prepare a dwelling place for each of us and our lives are a journey to that place. In our simplest everyday works of generosity and reconciliation, in the simplest love and care that we give and receive from family and friends, we begin to know God and understand the fullness of life he calls us to. As Christians, we live with the eternal hope of one day living in God's dwelling place.



Their "dwelling place" is the small apartment in an assisted living complex. Edward is the keeper of their memories of sixty years of marriage. He manages quite well on a cane, but Jane slumps in her wheelchair, slipping away a little more each day. He feeds her the little she eats and wheels her up and down the hallway. And then, he pulls up a chair next to her and tells her the same stories everyday about how they met, their courtship and wedding, the birth of their children and grandchildren and now their first great grandchild. In every re-telling, Christ is there.

Every winter night the chairs are folded up and the church school supplies are stored away and the cots come out. One group of volunteers from the parish staff the shelter each night. Another group prepares and cleans up after the meal, and yet another cleans the makeshift showers and the hall. When the parish decided to open their doors to the homeless, they never expected so many children; so they added a playroom. In this drab downtown church basement, God welcomes his sons and daughters into his dwelling place.



In his Last Supper farewell to His disciples, Jesus assured them that He goes to prepare a place in His Father's house. But, that place of hope and compassion and peace also exists here and now

in the places we make where the poor and sick are cared for, where the fallen are lifted up, where the lost and rejected are sought and guided home. In taking on- with joy and resolve- the work of compassion and reconciliation that Christ entrusts to us, we are building God's dwelling house in our midst. We are doing the work the Jesus has given us as His disciples to do, and by doing so we are sending up much material for our final resting place as we establish the reign of God in the here and now.

Resources

Connections May 2014

Connections May 2017

"The Cure for Heart Trouble," Ray Steadman.org