

Where Does God Live?  
A sermon by David Roquemore  
First Presbyterian Church, Newton, NC  
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John 14: 1-14

The first thing we have to do is liberate this text from every funeral you have ever attended. I know, it's hard. I am as guilty as anyone of appropriating this text for funerals. After all, what could be better than knowing God has prepared a special place all for you? I remember my sixth-grade Sunday school teacher who said, "even if there was nothing in that room at all, it would still enchant me forever and ever." Having lived a few more years, I kind of doubt we will sit in rooms, empty or not, forever and ever.

So how do we do this? I want to propose, on good authority, that a better translation of the verse two might be "In my Father's household are many dwelling places". What could that mean?

What we see here is that the terms that could be used spatially are, in John's Gospel, changed so that they move from the spatial dimension into a more spiritual one. "House" becomes "household," which means that the emphasis is not on a physical place or building, but on the people who live within that building.

Look around you — this is where God lives. Not in this building, but in us, among us.

What would this mean? For us to be God's dwelling? Well, all the way through the Old Testament we see that God desires a people that he will live among and be their God. Sometimes God gets honked at these people, because they just don't get it; they won't obey. But most of the time even though he is angry, God gets over it and takes his people back. That is who God is: he is endlessly forgiving.

That goes with God's living among us. If God lives among us, that doesn't mean we must be perfect or become perfect; it simply means that God forgives the little things we do — even the big things! God loves us with a love that will not stop. We are his beloved creatures. And God lives in us. Among us. We are God's dwelling, God's temple.

I think that means we don't have the right to kick anyone out. I know, there are churches out there, whole denominations out there, that seek to maintain some sort of doctrinal purity, and keep lots of people out. If we are not sure who we are, we can surely be sure who we are NOT: and we refuse to let them in, to see that God's grace reaches out to them.

I don't think any of that is legitimate. As far as I can see in the gospel, Jesus never did that He reached out to everyone. Even the woman he told that he was not sent to the Gentiles, — he healed her child anyway. You didn't have to be Jew. You didn't have to be a good Jew, a righteous one. All you had to do was ask Jesus for help, and you got it. It is

still that way - just as he dwelt among his people then physically, so he now dwells among us spiritually.

Which means of course that stuff like caring for each other, caring for the whole world, for the planet — all of that is not just a to-do list of “dumb stuff we gotta do” but rather is the action of God in the world through our efforts, using our hands and voices and brains to get it accomplished.

Of course, Thomas has a question. Lord, we don't know where you are going; how can we know the way? Jesus said he was going to prepare the way for us and Thomas pipes up with this question. Thomas is like most of us, thinking in geographic terms. In physical terms. Wherever Jesus is going, we need a map!

Some people can't read maps; they love their GPS. Others prefer a paper map. Some paper maps are wrong though; that's frustrating! One time I was trying to find a house, but the road shown on the map didn't exist. Apparently the map was made before the contractors finished the neighborhood, and they didn't put the street in. Ah, well.

But lots of us feel lost, for all sorts of reasons, many having nothing to do with maps or GPS. Jesus calls us to him, and says he will help us find our way. In fact, he IS the way.

Later in the passage Jesus says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”

This has been a troubling passage for many people. On face value, it seems to say, “Jesus is the only way to the Father.” And that's what many people believe. Of course, the unspoken subtext is “you must believe just the way and just the content we tell you.” You either believe in him, or you are lost. That is the exclusivist position.

That goes right along with keeping some people out. We can't have people who do THAT in heaven with us! We can't have ...you fill in the blank ...THOSE people up there! So we read this verse exclusively. The trouble is, when we do that, we may not know when to stop. We might have to kick some of our friends out, and then more, until we are the only ones left! I have known people like that!

But maybe there is a way to read this a little more inclusively. I think that, if Jesus IS the way to the Father, and the only way, that still does not mean that only certain Reformed Presbyterian Protestants are the ones who will make it there. It could also mean that anyone anywhere who loves God and neighbor, and seeks to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly before God, however they understand God, might just be saved too!

I know, that's a lot to swallow. But give it some thought. It could be true!

What I know is this: Jesus promises, and the Father and Spirit are included here, that God will dwell among his people, that we will be in his household, that in him we find the way to the father. We find the truth, about God, about who God is, about how God

acts. We find also life, and life is rich, abundant, and eternal, never ending or becoming boring.

Thanks be to God! Amen.