



**THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
MAY 10, 2020
"THE SOUL-FULL ROOM"**

JOHN 14: 1-14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."



SERMON

If you are familiar with this passage from John's gospel, you likely remember it being read at a funeral. Along with the 23rd psalm, this gospel text is a funeral mainstay. At first glance, it implies that the father's house is a heavenly mansion and that in this mansion yet to come, there are many rooms. As if we're all going to be competing for the penthouse suite in the sky.

This morning, I am asking you to set aside your heavenly associations and think about the text in, frankly, a more deeply spiritual and, hopefully, useful way.

Our challenge is to set aside our culture's focus on concrete, physical existence. It may be hard to consider that Jesus is speaking about another way of existing during our lifetime. After all, we possibly are in the early stages of a global pandemic. And Jesus may actually be saying that he is going to prepare the disciples and us for a more soulful and roomy existence now. That there is actually a realm of reality that is not limited by our senses and our ego-awareness.

This idea connects to his teaching about prayer where Jesus tells us to go into our room to pray. In the day, houses did not have many rooms. A house was one big room where people cooked, ate, played euchre, and slept.

So, the people of Jesus' day knew that when he said go into your room to pray, he meant their inner room. The room of the soul....

What is the function of soul, we may ask?

Soul imagines. Jesus is asking us to open our hearts and minds to the possibility that the spiritual way opens into a much roomier inner world.

Soul is the way of seeing that Jesus reveals. Soul deepens us. Something happens to us and when we see it soulfully, it becomes experience and experience feeds soul. Soul moves us into a depth of meaning. Soul may reveal purpose in the experience and point to our fate, our destiny, our calling, our or a change in our way. Soulful reflection deepens event into experience and hopefully experience



leads us to ask: how can I be useful to others? What do people need from me? Why am I here?

For example, when we dream of a house, the house is the primary symbol for soul. It is not unusual to find ourselves dreaming of our childhood house or a house we've never lived in during day reality.

Soul leads us to ask: why am I dreaming of my childhood home now? Or to ask: what does it mean that I am inhabiting a new room in my house at this time?

Carl Jung had a series of dreams over his lifetime where he continued to discover new rooms in his house, each room going deeper and deeper into earlier times of human development.

To dream of a new room in your house is to experience that soul is gaining breadth and depth, entering a new dimension of existence and experience.

As long as our spiritual awareness is limited by our senses—what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell—and by our small ego-awareness, we will live in anxiety. And that is a very small, claustrophobic room. We will feel alone and separate. We will struggle with life's challenges and trials. This teaching, then, is timely as we, together, face the pandemic.

Jesus' solution for this deep-seated anxiety is faith in him, which means faith in this unseen spiritual world symbolized by a mansion with many rooms.

The episcopal priest and Jungian analyst, John Sanford, points out that faith in this unseen spiritual world aids us in living at a deeper level than hope.

Hope may sustain us in the short-term, but hope may not be grounded in reality. Actually, hope has been called the 'seducer of soul.' As poet, T.S. Eliot wrote, "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hoping, lest you hope for the wrong things."

There appears to be a soulful place between hope and fear where faith in the unseen spiritual world comes alive.



Later in this farewell teaching, Jesus will speak of “the peace that the world cannot give” which is his gift to us....

This is “the way” of which Jesus speaks that leads to this inner peace amidst the troubles, the travails, and the trials.

The disciple, Thomas, represents all who orient their lives solely around the way of the ego and the five senses. Thomas wants a downloadable road map so he can know the way: here’s what those directions would sound like in Pittsburgh: (Pittsburgh dad video)

This is the typical concrete, extraverted view of the way. In this same materialistic perspective, biblical literalists interpret Jesus’ statement “I am the way, the truth and the life” as meaning a literal belief in Jesus which often includes some confession of faith.

Yet the Greek word for way or road is used over a hundred times in the new testament, both in a conventional sense and a mystical sense.

It is important to know that John’s gospel is the least conventional gospel of the four gospels. John’s gospel is symbolized by an eagle. John gives us this magnificent, visionary, sky high grand bird’s eye view of Christ and the way.

For John, Christ is the mystical way, the path that leads to light and understanding. This way is experiential. God comes to us as our life. It is the way of following the universal pattern of Christ. It is the way of growing spiritual awareness, of growing awareness of the unseen spiritual world. It is the way of hard-fought wisdom that leads us to our proper spiritual destination.

Think of the way as a journey of deepening into understanding and seeing spiritual reality.

Let’s use family as an example.

When we are young, it is important for us to have a sense of being valued within the small group of people that is our nuclear family. Hopefully, we also



Experience being part of a tribe or clan. Going to the family reunion where we meet distant cousins and other relatives. And, if we grow up in a church, we have our church family. Growing up as a Lutheran gave me a sense of identity and a positive experience of a faith community. We have friends who we include in our closest relationships. But the way ends here for many people. Their house remains rather small and insular. More people are outside the family than in the family.

But the way of Christ leads deeper into other spiritual rooms.

If I look back on my life soulfully, I see I had the experience of growing up in an integrated Lutheran congregation. My Sunday morning friends were both white and black. My role models were white and black adults. There was never a question that when the black head usher, Dewey rice, put his hand on my shoulder during worship to quiet me down, that I needed to heed his authority.

This became another room.

I went to school with blacks and Jews, many who became my best friends to this day. Steve Bartfield sends me a cartoon about dogs every morning to brighten my life. My religious room got deeper and wider. I would go to temple with my friends at the Jewish old folks home and experience the integrity of their worship.

At a young age, my world was getting roomier. And my world, friendlier. And more connected.

And so, it has gone in my life. Playing in integrated bands. Being the only white guy in the band. Becoming good friends with a gay celibate catholic priest. Studying the similarities between Christianity and Zen Buddhism in seminary.

And so, the family gets larger and more differentiated. As a pastoral psychotherapist, sitting with gay and lesbian individuals and couples. What a surprise! Experiencing that their humanity is just like mine. All facing the same life and relational issues. The same spiritual questions. And clients from other nationalities, until family blossoms into the entire human race....



This example is from the visible world.

Jesus is telling us is that the unseen spiritual world is just as complex and roomy as the visible world. And it is rooted in and grows in soul. I remember a denominational bible study from the early 1980s that concluded that God desires fat souls. What a lovely image!

The first step is the realization that Jesus is speaking truth: the way, the truth and the life. Follow me into the mansion in this lifetime, Jesus is saying.

The Jungian analyst, James Hillman, writes: "we must look back over our lives and look at some of the accidents and curiosities and oddities and troubles and sicknesses and begin to see more in those things than we saw before. It raises questions, so that when peculiar little accidents happen, you ask whether there is something else is at work in your life."

This is a more reverential, soulful way to live. The notion that there are other forces at work in our lives that we cannot see.

What the pandemic reveals for so many people is that they are not comfortable in the inner rooms of their souls. People are showing us that they are itchy and bored and lost and swift to jump at any quick fix.

Just get me out of my own skin!!!! Distract me from myself!!!!

The pandemic requires that we spend more time in our inner room, but many people cannot stand their inner life and want to get out there and party! I'm dying without NASCAR and being able to get drunk at the Kenny Chesney concert....

Ikkyu, the crazy Japanese monk, has a poem:

You do this, you do that

You argue left, you argue right

You come down, you go up



This person says no, you say yes

Back and forth

You are happy

You are really happy

He is saying: stop all the nonsense. You're really happy. Just stop for a moment and you'll realize that you're happy just being.

But just being has to do with living out of one's expanding inner rooms of soul. The inner mansion.

Jesus' final teaching brings it all together; "You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it."

For those who live only in a projected external world, this teaching has been twisted and distorted so that anything I want, anything my ego wants will be given me if I just ask in Jesus' name. And so then there is all this nonsense attached to the name of Jesus, asking in the mighty name of Jesus.

Father, I ask for a raise and a new car and a healing of my diabetes while I eat cherry pie and three scoops of ice cream, in the mighty name of jes-he-sus.

Asking in Christ's name means that we ask without a shred of egocentricity because we are grounded in the inner room of soul where Christ dwells. In the unseen world. Unless we are asking from the true center of the living room of our soul, we are really asking in our own name.

How about we ask for the valuable furniture in the inner rooms of the soul:

Rid me of my narcissism. Help me be more patient, more generous. Give me your spirit, o Christ. Show me how I can be more useful to people.

How about asking for compassion and courage?



How about desiring a more stable mind, a more solid footing?

How about asking for inner peace, rather than warring within yourself?

How about asking for the capacity to live in the eternal now of the kingdom of God?

How about asking to be aware and awake to spiritual reality?

How about asking for the inner roominess of being connected to all and everything?

How about asking for a soul-full room?

SERMON SONG

IN MY ROOM (BEACH BOYS)