

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV

Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: May 7, 2023 Year A, 5th Sunday of Easter

Text: John 14:1-14

Title: There's a Place for You

Focus: At the Communion Table and in the family of God, Jesus reassures us that there's a place for you.

John 14:1-14

¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And 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.

⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." ⁸Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

"Teacher, what is the Greatest Commandment?"

Do you remember how Jesus responded when he was asked,

- "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment?" (Matthew 22:36)

If you remember Jesus' response, maybe both the question and the response don't seem too complicated to you. Maybe you think that was a ready response, even an easy one to give.

How many Jewish laws were they expected to keep? 613?

Even in God's relationship with the people of Israel, there were ten. . .

"Jesus, what's the greatest commandment?"

Even Jesus couldn't single out just one. When he replied he said,

- ‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment.
- ³⁹And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

That was as brief and concise as Jesus chose to be.

The Sacraments have a Multiplicity of Meanings

In the sacraments of Baptism and Communion, there are a multiplicity of meanings.

- Sacraments are instituted by Jesus, meaning that he himself demonstrated and instructed about them.
- Sacraments are a tangible means of experiencing the grace of God , by which Christ Jesus offers his life to us in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- The Sacraments use ordinary things—the basic elements of water, bread, and wine—in proclaiming the extraordinary love of God.

Whether you reflect upon them individually or together, the sacraments are rich in meaning. Because of how Jesus introduced them and the history of the universal Church on which they rest, and the richness of the symbolism, there is no single meaning as though one could unequivocally state, “This is what baptism means” or “This is what communion means” and have that be the end of it. Or the richness of the symbolism and meaning of both sacraments is such that different people could describe what baptism means to them and you'd be hard-pressed to say that they were wrong. It would be like two different people describing the beauty of a sunset or a rainbow.

Here is some of you could say about the meaning of the Sacraments. They are about:

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| • Welcome | • Self-giving love |
| • Invitation | • Response to that love |
| • Hospitality | • A shared meal |
| • Belonging | • Forgiveness |
| • Washing or cleansing | • Thanksgiving |
| • Initiation—a beginning | • Strengthening (for service, for instance) |
| • Family | • Others? |
| • Community | |

It's not as though baptism or communion mean whatever you want them to mean, but there are multiple meanings suggested by the richness of the acts and different ways that people may express what that means to them.

Family Communion Workshop

Let's talk more specifically about Communion—about the invitation to come to the table. . .

- Could you begin to say what Communion means to you? Could you express that to someone else?

Last Sunday afternoon there were 12 children from Good Shepherd, who with their parents and some leaders, gathered to talk about Communion at the “Family Communion Workshop.” We wanted to provide a hands-on learning experience to talk about the meaning of Communion.

In recent months as we gather each week for worship, some of these children who came to the class have not yet received Communion but have come forward for a blessing. Others have received Communion. Whether we have previously received Communion or not, we all benefit from talking and learning together.

For children of differing ages and experiences and differing ways of learning and the richness of meaning about the sacrament that we've already mentioned, what would you hope that they grasp? What meaning would they latch onto or associate with the sacrament?

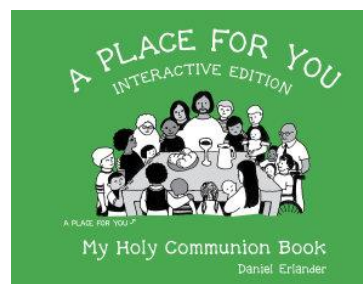
Lutheran pastor and author-illustrator Daniel Erlander offers a response in his book which we used as the primary tool for the class.

That title of the book is what you see printed on the banner we created in the class and now a parament on the Communion Table or Altar:

- **There's “A Place for You”**

Not to the exclusion of all other meanings in the sacrament, but as a joyous, overarching declaration, Pastor Erlander wants children of whatever age to know, “There's a Place for You.” You are welcome at this table.

His simple, distinctive line drawings accompany the book and complement and reinforce the meaning.



Saying Goodbye: The Farewell Discourse

“Could you say what Communion means to you?” is one question I posed to you. Now I want you to think of another setting in which you are challenged to narrow down all the things you *could* say to what's most important.

- If you knew you were saying goodbye to those most dear to you, what would you say?

That's the scenario posed to Jesus in today's reading from the Gospel of John. We're in chapter 14 and this is a portion from what is called "The Farewell Discourse." This name given to this section of text from John 13-17 is the fancy way of saying what I just said. Jesus knows that his death is approaching and he is saying goodbye to the disciples. Can you imagine that kind of end-of-life setting, either for Jesus with the disciples, or what that would be like for you or another loved one?

- What would you say?
- What would you want them to know?
- Out of all the experiences you shared together, what would you want to reinforce for them?
- If you knew you were leaving, how would you prepare them or how would you want to reassure them?

Thinking about these questions puts you into the setting of the text and helps you to think about the content. What would Jesus say?

What Jesus says to the disciples as his death nears is a whole lot like the message at the table: **There's a place for you.**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And 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.

There's a place for you.

(Jesus is telling them,) "I don't want you to be anxious. I want you to know that you are loved. I want you to know that God's abiding love continues for you even beyond this life. There's a place for you."

We might anxiously wonder, "What will that look like? What is heaven like? Is it a real place and do we have real bodies?"

All those are reasonable questions prompted by our curiosity, but it seems that here, what Jesus most wants us to know is that **there's a place for you.**

Jesus is speaking with the disciples—those closest to him. When time is short and his death is near, what is most important to say?

On the cusp of this time of radical change, which will include Jesus' trial, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus wants them to know and be reassured by the enduring steadfast love of God. You belong. There's a place for you where you may continue to abide, remain, stay with God.

There's a place for you. **Thanks be to God for a love like that.**