

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
May 14, 2017

Empty Home? Come to an Empty Tomb to be Filled

John 14:1-6

"A Place for You"

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² 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? ³ 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. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

What does the ideal home look like? Is it the nuclear family? Is it the extended family? What about blended families and empty nesters? What about single parents and families that haven't been blessed with children?

It is hard to picture the ideal home. But I do have a picture in mind. Oddly enough, there isn't a mother or father immediately in this picture, but they are not too far in the background.

My picture of the ideal home is in John 13. There Jesus as the head of the "home" gathers those whom he loves around him. What makes this an ideal home is that it is a home filled with love.

The head of the home shows love. He gets up from the table, wraps a towel around his waist and starts to serve his disciples by doing the lowliest task in the home, washing their dust-covered feet. I never thought of it until just now, but I wonder if the disciples would have walked a little more carefully in the streets if they knew that Jesus was about to wash their feet? Would they have stepped around the sheep dung and avoided the open sewer more carefully? I bring up that picture not to disgust us, but to appreciate how unappealing this task of foot washing was.

But Jesus showed them the full extent of his love. He knew who he was, "that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God" (John 13:3). He could humble himself in this way without diminishing who he is.

1. Celebrate a home filled with love.

This is the ideal home, where the greatest leads the way in serving. So there is no mom present in the foreground of this picture. But on this Mother's Day, most of us can see our moms in that image of serving. Moms willingly put the needs of children before themselves. It begins in the discomfort and danger of pregnancy, through the pain of childbirth, through diaper changes and wiping bottoms and noses and putting meals before our eyes even when we didn't appreciate this gift.

Today, let's celebrate when we see our homes reflecting this ideal home and especially the mother's role in making our homes filled with loving service.

And what gift can you give to your mother or your mother's memory on Mother's Day? Here too I turn to John 13 to see what happens in the ideal Christian home.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another. All people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

The greatest gift that a disciple can give to Jesus is the gift of loving one another. I'm amazed that he didn't say, "All people will know that you are my disciples if you love me." It is easy to love your "idealized" Savior. It is a lot harder to love the disciples with filthy feet seating next to you in the pew today. They have walked through some pretty filthy stuff. Siblings have hurt you. They have made decisions that you feel hurt your mom or your dad. Many of you feel that one of your siblings have taken advantage of your mom or your dad. Others of you are envious because it seems like mom and dad played favorites. Others see the filth on their parents' feet. Whatever it is, it is easy to say, "Yuck! I am not going to wash their feet. I'll wash Jesus' feet. I love him. Today I'll wash my mom's feet. Because I love her. But don't even think about me washing my brothers and sisters feet, my cousin's or my fellow church member's feet."

But the ideal home is not where children love their mom and dad, but where children love each other and serve each other. A mom is most proud, not when one of her children helps her, but when mom can see that her loving service to her children reflected in the loving service that the next generation gives.

On this Mother's Day, let's celebrate those homes filled with love, those homes that have reflected the loving service of the Savior. Let's celebrate Christian homes where the home is filled with this powerful Christian witness. "See how they love each other."

At the same time, let's confess that our homes are less than ideal. Let's confess that we have not only failed our moms, or failed in our roles as moms and dads, but we have failed our God.

There is many a home represented here today that has been filled with sin. So we begin our Mother's Day celebration with a confession of our sin and receive God's forgiveness. As you approach the altar today for the Lord's Supper, come confessing your part in making your home

anything less than the ideal that Jesus has set before us, and see that Jesus came, not just to wash your feet, but to wash your sins away.

It is in this through this personal introspection and renewed appreciation of God's forgiveness that we prepare for a home filled with pain.

2. Prepare for a home filled with pain.

Even the ideal home was filled with pain. After Jesus' wonderful example of loving service, what happens? Jesus announces, "One of you is going to betray me" (John 13:21).

This is where I appreciate the video presentations of the Gospels. The actor who portrays Jesus looks at the character of Judas. What is in Jesus' eyes? Is it anger? No, it is pain. "Jesus was troubled in spirit" (John 13:21).

But it is not only the pain of betrayal. It is the pain of pride. Peter boasts, "I will lay down my life for you" (John 13:37).

Can you imagine the pain in Jesus' heart as he has to say to Peter, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times" (John 13:39).

One of the struggles I have with preaching on Mother's Day is that it is often a day when women are filled with pain. The pain of children who don't love each other. The pain of children who have turned their backs on the faith. The pain of children who have committed life-altering sins.

In addition, there is the pain of homes where there is the desire to be a mom or dad, but it seems that God has betrayed you, that he has crushed your dreams.

On top of that pain is the ultimate pain ... the pain of separation and death.

That is what filled the apostles with pain that evening. Their dear friend was saying that he was leaving them.

Every one of us will experience this pain of separation sometime in our lives. It may simply be the pain of a child leaving home. But often it is the pain of a parent or a child dying.

It would be wonderful for me to tell you that if you are a Christian family, you will never suffer that pain. But that would be a lie. Even in the ideal home of the Savior, this pain was coming. We can't avoid it. But we can prepare for it. We prepare for it by claiming a home filled with hope.

3. Claim a home filled with hope.

"Don't let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1). How can Jesus say that? When you experience that pain that sin brings to your family life, when you experience the separation of death, how can he say, "Let not your hearts be troubled"? Doesn't he understand?

Of course he does. It is earlier in this same Gospel that John records that Jesus wept (John 11:35). But what he does is to direct the disciples' eyes and ours away from our own homes to his heavenly Father's home. When our eyes are focused on our Father's home, our home... no matter where we are and what is happening ... will be a home filled with hope.

“Trust in God. Trust also in me.”

That is hard to do. That's why I go back to this empty tomb again and again. Is our God trustworthy? Can I find hope in him?

It is really the question, “Was the tomb empty?” If Jesus' tomb on Easter was empty, then he is trustworthy. Then I can step back to the tomb and find peace and calm for my heart.

If your hearts are troubled, I would invite you to go back to the empty tomb this week. Go to the tomb with Mary Magdalene in Matthew 28 and John 20. Express your doubts like Thomas. Walk with the two men on the way to Emmaus in Luke 24. List the witnesses like Paul did in 1 Corinthians 15.

If that tomb was empty, then our God is trustworthy. All his promises are true. What brings hope to homes that are filled with pain? Some marvelous promises!

First there is a place where you belong!

My daughter's family is a blended family. Not all the children are with them all the time. But it was remarkable as they were crowded for space that they insisted that her step children each have their own room just like the other children. Why? Because there is always a place for them in this home!

Jesus said, “I am going to prepare a place for you.” At times we feel like we don't fit in, as though the pain in our current homes is an indication that somehow we don't fit into God's plans.

But he has gone to prepare a place for you. That preparation included going to the cross for your sins. The pain that you feel today may very well be caused by the guilt of sins remembered, the “could haves” and “would haves” of parenthood and childhood and adulthood. Jesus went to that cross to prepare a place for you. His death on the cross says that you always have a place waiting for you in the home of our heavenly Father.

And this place is guaranteed for you because Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The wording that Jesus used is reminiscent of a marriage ceremony. A young man in Jesus' day would have said to his beloved, “I am going to my father's home to prepare a room for us in my father's compound. When I'm done, I'm going to come back for you and we will get married so that we can be together forever!”

Jesus knows that in the best of times, our homes are a reflection of his ideal home... a place where moms and dads show self-sacrificing love and children carry on that family tradition by

loving each other. But he also knows that every family is going to be a place of pain because of sin. So he talks to us like his bride.

“I know your life right now isn’t everything it could be. I’m going away to my Father’s house right now. I’m going to get a place for us there to stay. You don’t need to worry about anything. I’ll take care of it. And when the time is right, I’ll come back and lead you there. You won’t need a map. You won’t need to bring anything along. Just wait for me, and I’ll take you there. There, in my Father’s home, we’ll be together forever. I can hardly wait. I’ll be coming soon, my dearly loved one!”

And so on this Mother’s Day weekend, we are waiting. We rejoice in homes filled with love. We encourage each other as sin and death bring pain into our homes. And we wait for the best home of all. We all know how to get to that home. We will just follow Jesus.

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Amen.

Prepared by Pastor Peter Panitzke

ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org or 414-422-0320 x 122

My Next Steps

- **Memorize this promise that, no matter what your home life is like, there is a place for you:** “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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” (John 14:2-3 NIV¹⁹⁸⁴).
- **See what Jesus is doing for you now.** Next weekend we will celebrate Jesus’ ascension. Prepare for this special day by seeing how Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for you
 - by living to intercede like a Priest for you (1 John 2:1-2).
 - by providing for His Church (Ephesians 4:7-16),
 - by ruling as King for His Church (Ephesians 1:18-23),