

In My Father's House...

... I have prepared a place for you

*A reflection given on Fifth Sunday of Easter 10th May 2020, by the Associate Vicar,
the Revd Wendy Wale, in the Online Service*

John 14:1-14

Tom or I may have to pick up a pair of shoes or pull a suitcase down from the top of the wardrobe, and Jonah our cockapoo spaniel is there. His separation-anxiety is triggered and he's desperate not to be separated from us. If we're putting our shoes on, he's stood underneath the lead by the door, willing us to take him for a walk, wherever we may be going. If we get our suitcases out, he climbs on the bed and tries to climb in the suitcase; and if that's not possible, he lies on whatever pile of clothes we've put out, determined that wherever we will be going, he'll be coming with us. Sometimes the only thing we can do is to put on his lead or put him in the car to wait for us, then he can settle down in peace.

Our reading today finds the disciples in a similar state of anxiety: we can only imagine the emotions they must be feeling: still reeling from the grief of the crucifixion; the relief of the resurrection; the continued fear for their own lives; and then a short-lived peace because Jesus was back with them. With them, but alluding to his imminent departure : he put the suitcase out on the bed; their hearts were troubled. And Jesus speaks to their fears, "Believe in God, believe in me. In my father's house, there are many dwelling places", or in other translations, "many rooms. I've told you where I'm going. I'm going to prepare a place for you.

"Yes," say the disciples, "but that still means you're going. How are we going to find you? Can we come with you? We don't know where you're going or how to get there." You can feel their anxiety rising: everything is so confusing; they just want to be sat in the metaphorical suitcase or in the car with the doors closed, and Jesus in the driving seat. They're not ready to cope alone again. Jesus is gently hinting, pointing, preparing for his ascension to the father. We, as readers, of course, have benefit of having read the end of the story, but they were in the middle of it. Jesus is gently preparing them for the time when they could do greater things than they had already seen because of the power and presence of his Holy Spirit. And of course,

that would have been far too much to understand ahead of Pentecost. Jesus simply invites them to trust who he really is, "Believe me, but I am in the Father and the Father is in me. I am going to the Father, that the Father may be glorified in the son. Ask me for anything in my name: I will do it; I am the way, the truth, the life."

And for me, this is both the promise and the invitation for us as people of faith at this time: will we trust God, even when our anxiety has been triggered and we feel abandoned; can we hold on to Jesus's promise that he is the way, the truth and the life? We, like the disciples, are living in the eye of the storm: history will look back on this time and reflect with the benefit of hindsight what the bigger picture might have been. But for now, we can only see the next set of numbers or the next piece of government advice. Like the disciples, I imagine that each of us has had huge questions at different points during this pandemic: where are you, God? Have we been abandoned? What will happen? Will I ever see my family again? Will I catch it? And would I survive? Is there anything I can do to help? What will life and church look like in the future? - questions for politicians and preachers, cleaners and care home workers, the vulnerable and the furloughed, the student nurse and the scared teenager.

Jesus still responds, "I am the way, the truth and the life: bring me your questions, I'll give you my peace: bring me your fears, I'll take your hand and walk with you; bring me your future, I have prepared a place for you in my Father's house."

Reading Texts

John 14:1-14

¹ "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ² In 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? ³ And 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. ⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." ⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹ Jesus 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'?" ¹⁰ Do 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. ¹¹ Believe 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. ¹² Very 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. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.