

Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 5, 2026

John 14:1-14

One of the preaching podcasts I listen to brought up a memory stored deep within me. It was this song from the late 90's. It may have been the first Christian song I learned when I started attending church. It goes, "It's a big, big house. With lots and lots of rooms. A big, big table. With lots and lots of food. A big, big yard. Where we can play football. A big, big house. It's my father's house." Anyone remember that? Audio Adrenaline. Gosh, I even think I saw them in concert like 25 years ago. It was a fun song based off this part of Jesus' discourse.

Today's gospel is a common funeral text picked. This understanding that Jesus has come before us and prepared a way for us. And we enter into the heavenly courts to this mansion God has built with all of these rooms. There's even an old joke about these rooms being separated by Christian denominations.

Someone comes up to the heavenly gates and St. Peter asks their religion and they reply that they're X denomination. St. Peter looked down his list and said, "Go to Room 24, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8." Another person arrived at the gates of Heaven. When asked their religion, they reply Y denomination. St. Peter says, "Go to Room 18, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8." A third person arrived at the gates and when asked their religion, replied Z denomination. St. Peter tells them, "Go to Room 11 but be very quiet as you pass Room 8." The last person asks why they should be quiet when passing Room 8. St. Peter told them, "Well, this Q denomination is in Room 8, and they think they're the only ones here."

Chuckle worthy, but also a lived reality. I'm sure we've all encountered someone who thinks their interpretation of scripture is the correct one and everyone else is condemned.... Or at least will be sternly corrected when they get to heaven. But that's for another day.

This part of scripture that we heard in our gospel today is part of what's known as Jesus' farewell discourse. It occurs during Maundy Thursday – the last supper. Jesus already broke bread, foretold of his betrayal, washed feet, and all that jazz. Here he goes on for a few chapters giving his final words before he gets handed over. Sort of his saying goodbye. Granted he was going to be back in a few days...

But we remember that the disciples minds weren't opened to what Jesus says until after the resurrection. So he says all of this, and the disciples end up putting it all together after the resurrection. But he was trying to give the disciples a word of hope. That's why this is often a piece of scripture that brings comfort at the end of life, because it's Jesus promising good things for his followers. We like these "feel good" moments. The hope that Jesus brings, even as he was facing his own betrayal, torture, and death.

His first words here are "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Easier said than done, especially for the disciples who had to watch him be murdered less than 24 hours later. My sermon was initially going along the lines of finding these words as a way to not fret about the world around us. Seeing wars wage, prices of everything continue to increase, families being torn apart, children starving... But saying to not let your heart be troubled over these things seemed anti-the gospel message.

Because that wasn't what Jesus was talking about here. Jesus wasn't telling the disciples to ignore what was going on around them. But rather he was trying to give eternal hope, knowing that misfortune was going to befall them in the not too distant future. They were going to face condemnation and eventual death for their faith as well. We heard about Stephen this morning in our Acts reading.

So, do not let your hearts be troubled. Not about my death, or your own eventual demise. Because I am the way. I'm going to prepare a place for you. I am the one who will bring you there.

Sometimes in the midst of all the bad news surrounding us, we need that eternal hope. That's why we call the gospel the good news. Because that eternal hope that Jesus gives us is what gets us through the tumult of the world. The disciples were going to need it as they faced Jesus death. And post-resurrection, once their eyes were opened to actually understand what this meant, they needed this hope as they went out to grow the church, and face their own condemnation.

And we need it today as we continue to go out and live the gospel. It can be disheartening to continue trying to share Jesus' love in a world that would much rather hate. No matter how much we go out and proclaim this inclusive love of God, there's always going to be someone seemingly louder doing the opposite.

Maybe they're a part of that denomination in room 8.

Maybe they're our neighbors.

Whatever resistance we face as Christ followers, we keep the words that Jesus shares in our hearts knowing that the eternal hope is what gives us strength to move forward. To take that next step when all seems futile. Because we know that when Christ goes ahead to prepare a place, it's for his whole kingdom. Not just those who fit into room 8. But for all that Jesus came to save.

It's a big, big house with lots and lots of room for all of God's children. And we fortunately are a part of that. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We all have experienced God through him and the work of the spirit in our world today. Amen.