

“A Place for You,” John 14:1-11 (April 2, 2017)

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many rooms. 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, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to 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 had known me, you would have known 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 it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? 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 authority, 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, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

PRAY

Before I get to the text, I wish to remind you that at Grace Bible we will do something different on Easter week, which is next week, something we’ve never done before. At 12:30 each day that week, Monday through Friday, we will have a very brief service at our Heritage Drive location. We will pray, sing a hymn, read a passage of the Bible, and be dismissed. Each of the five gatherings won’t last more than fifteen minutes. Kids are welcome, though there will be no childcare.

We’re offering these services because we want to do something to help build anticipation for Easter Sunday. We want to come together daily and set aside time to call on God that he would make this Easter a wonderful time of worship in the life of our church, and while we can’t guarantee that this Easter will be any different from any of the others we can at least ask. I know a lot of people aren’t free to go anywhere at 12:30 on a weekday, but if you are, I encourage you to come.

We are studying the gospel of John this spring, and today we make it into John 14. We read in verse one that Jesus says to his disciples, the eleven that remained in the upper room (Judas had already left them), Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” If you look back and read the last several verses of chapter thirteen, you’ll see that the disciples were indeed troubled. They were troubled because Jesus said first of all that he was going away, and where he was going they could not follow. Try and imagine how much they admired Jesus, loved Jesus, and here he is saying he’s leaving them. Of course their hearts are troubled. Then in John 13:38 Jesus says that Peter, the rock, is going to deny Jesus three times. You know that troubled Peter, and it probably troubled the other disciples too because they had to think, “My goodness, if Peter will deny Jesus, what does that mean I might do?”

We are troubled, too. Not for the same reasons the disciples were, obviously, but everyone here this morning is troubled to some degree about something. Maybe it's a result of the troubles that are just common to life (like money, job, health, kids, marriage, loneliness), or severe troubles (divorce, betrayal, or death). Jesus actually says in John 16 that in this world you will have trouble.

But Jesus here in these eleven verses gives us an antidote for troubles. He tells us two things: first, that we have a place. Second, that we know the way.

First, we have a place. It is a fundamental human need to feel like you belong, to feel like you are at home. **To have a place** means to have somewhere you can rest, be yourself, be accepted, feel at peace. If you are my age or older, you remember a time when the only way to get original, professional entertainment in your home, aside from recorded music, was through the three broadcast television networks. This was before cable, before satellite, before Betamax and VCR and DVR, certainly before streaming on your phone. It's crazy now when we live in a time where websites like Amazon are winning Emmys for the entertainment they produce that there was a time when there were only three options: CBS, ABC, and NBC (and maybe PBS if you were really cerebral and liked *Masterpiece Theater*).

But everyone my age or older remembers that, and remembers the television show *Cheers*, and you know how the theme song of that show went: "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came. You want to be where you can see your troubles are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name."

We all want that, not sometimes like the song says, but all the time. Yet it's really hard to feel like that in a town like Oxford, because so few of us are actually from here. Most of us moved here, so we spend a lot of time and money and energy to try make Oxford feel that way for us. We expend a lot of money trying to make our houses feel like our place, trying to create an environment where we can rest and feel at peace and re-energized and recharged. Or, we put that energy into finding friends, hobbies, or a church where we can feel like we belong, because we had to leave all that behind to get here. Or, some of us have given up altogether on feeling at home in Oxford, so we take every chance we find to get the heck out of Oxford and put it in our rearview mirror and head to somewhere else we do feel like we belong – our place where we can relax and find peace. Maybe it's your favorite vacation spot. I know one guy that every weekend would drive almost three hours to his farm because he could relax there and he sure couldn't in Oxford.

Maybe you take those chances to go back to your actual original hometown, because you think maybe that's your place. Maybe there, you think, I can breathe. *But you can't go home again, can you?* Once you grow up and move off, you can go back to your hometown, you can move back into the house you grew up in, and while you can enjoy it, you're not really at peace there, are you? I'm not from Oxford, but from Kosciusko. But I can't really feel home there anymore. Things have changed, people have changed, you have changed – and you can't get back to the way things were. And, almost certainly, the

peace you feel now when you think of your hometown exists only in your memory. You didn't actually feel that much at home in your hometown when you lived there, because, after all, *you left*. That's nostalgia you feel when you think of that place, not really peace. That is, by the way, why so many people move to Oxford – not everyone, but a lot. They can't wait to get up here because when they remember their days as students at Ole Miss, they remember them as being wonderful (if even they really weren't all that great), and so they buy a condo here hoping that maybe with enough weekends here in the spring and fall they'll finally be happy.

None of it, though, will ever really be *our place*. C.S. Lewis diagnoses this phenomenon in his book *Mere Christianity*: “Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world ... The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that interests us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy ... There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and the scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us.”

But Jesus says in verse 2 that Christians do have a place, they do have a home where the longing will be fulfilled. John 14:2-3: “²In my Father's house are many rooms. 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, that where I am you may be also.”

What is the Father's house? It's heaven. Heaven, Jesus says, is your place. Heaven is your heart's true home. In Philippians 3:20, Paul writes, “But our citizenship is in heaven.” When you are a citizen of one place, you cannot feel completely at home anywhere else. I have not traveled a lot in my life. I have barely lived outside of Mississippi. I was born here and spent all but three years of my life here. So when I do travel outside of Mississippi, whether it's to Los Angeles, or out of the country, or honestly just Louisiana or Tennessee, I feel it. I notice it. I like the travel, but I'm extremely aware that I don't fit in those places.

My earthly citizenship is in Mississippi. But I don't even feel completely at home here. Why? My true citizenship is elsewhere. It's in heaven. That's my heart's true home.

Jesus says that he goes there to prepare a place for all his people. He says, “In my Father's house are many rooms.” Jesus there is using the imagery of the temple in Jerusalem to try and get across what heaven is like. The temple in ancient Israel had at its center the two rooms of worship: the Holy Place, where the priests ministered daily, and the Most Holy Place, the inner sanctum, where the glory presence of God dwelt on earth behind the veil. You might call it God's throne room on earth.

But the temple also had other rooms built onto it, rooms to store various items used in religious worship, and also rooms for the priests to live in while they served. We know

from the Old Testament that the prophet Samuel, when he was a boy, lived in one of these rooms, and the high priest Eli lived in another.

But Jesus here is saying that the temple on earth the Father's house in Jerusalem, is a foreshadowing, a copy, a type, of the true Father's house in heaven. The author of Hebrews calls that house "...the greater and more perfect tent [temple] (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)..." Hebrews 9:11. And in the true house, there won't be rooms just for the priests. It won't be just a few of God's people who dwell next to the throne room in heaven, but all God's people. There are many rooms there.

Not mansions. A lot of you grew up on the King James Version of the Bible, and you know that it says, "In my Father's house are many mansions." But when the King James Version was written, the word "mansions" meant something like "apartments."

Jesus says that in heaven all his people have a room waiting on them, and that will be forever their place. That is where they will be able to truly breathe, finally be able to relax, feel accepted, know they belong, know they are home. It's their place.

But why? What is it about heaven that's so great? If you think of heaven as the place where you go to get your wings and sit on a cloud and strum a harp for eternity, that doesn't sound like my kind of place. It sounds more like hell than some place I want to go.

But that's not heaven. What makes heaven *heaven* is not primarily that we have a room, nor that we will be reunited with our loved ones (though that will be wonderful). What will make heaven *heaven* is that there we will finally, with unveiled faces, behold our God.

We can't see God right now. We only see him if we strain with eyes of faith, and then we catch only a glimpse. But then we will see him face to face. We will experience what the theologians of old called the *visio dei*, the vision of God. God is so glorious, so wonderful, and so beautiful that once we see him we will never want to look away. We will be content, completely content, for the first time in our existence. We will be satisfied, totally satisfied, never to need another thing.

I read the other day about a guy who every week for years went to the Art Institute of Chicago just to sit and stare at George Suerat's painting *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* [la grand shot]. Lest you think I'm cultured you need to know I've never seen it in person. I only know about it because it's in the movie *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. But this guy couldn't get enough of it. He stared and stared and stared at it because it satisfied him. Its beauty brought him joy. And maybe you feel that way about something or some place too, but sooner or later you have to look away. Sooner or later you have to leave. Sooner or later you have to eat, and sleep, and go make a living. No matter how meaningful it might be to you, it can't really satisfy you. It can't sustain you.

But beholding your God in heaven will, because he made you to be satisfied by him and in him alone. Beholding your God won't just bring you joy, *it will nourish you*. It will feed and sustain you. You will never want to look away from his beauty and you'll never have to. He alone can satisfy.

In Revelation 4 we get a glimpse into the throne room of heaven, and we read that the four living creatures “day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’” Revelation 4:8. The old Westminster Catechism said it well: “What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.” We were built, friends, to behold our God. And until we do nothing else will satisfy. Nothing else will give us peace. Nothing else will make us feel like we belong.

Now, back to how we started the sermon: Jesus tells his disciples about this place because he doesn’t want their hearts to be troubled. How does knowing we have this place keep our hearts from trouble?

In her book *Passion and Purity*, one of my favorite all-time books, Elisabeth Elliot writes about her relationship with Jim Elliot, her first husband. They met at Wheaton College, fell in love – they never dated, they never even courted, but they knew when they left Wheaton College that if they were ever going to get married it would be to the other. However, they both felt called to the mission field – Jim to South America and Elisabeth to Africa. Jim in particular thought that with the kind of work he wanted to do he had to be unmarried. They loved each other, they wanted one another, but they feared they would be disobeying God if they married. So for six years (which is an awful long time at that age), they waited, they tried to be faithful in their callings, until at last God brought them together, and they finally got married in Panama in 1953. It was a small affair, just a couple of friends there as witnesses.

Now this book is really a book on discipleship, but as a part of that this book was written by Elisabeth to encourage Christians young people to take the biblical view that sex is for marriage, and only for marriage. Jim and Elisabeth never even kissed before their wedding. Elisabeth writes in the book that at supper after their wedding, while just the two of them talked over coffee and dessert, Jim looked over the candles, and he said, “I can hardly believe we’ve got a bed waiting for us!” And Elisabeth writes: “The verse given to us for that day [she doesn’t say how it was given – I’ve always wondered] was Isaiah 25:9: ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him.’” And then she closes the chapter with these words: “It was unspeakably worth the wait.” Obviously she was just talking about marriage, and the joys of marriage.

But this is what I want you to see: if you know today that one day in heaven you will say, “This is unspeakably worth the wait,” if you have full assurance and certain hope right now that then you will be completely satisfied, completely fulfilled, totally full of joy, lost in wonder, love, and praise – if you know that one day that will be you and you will be in your place, *then you can face your troubles now*. You can find peace in the midst of troubles *now*. The world around you might fall apart, but you’ll have a place to stand, because one day you know one day you will say, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him. This is unspeakably worth the wait.” That keeps our hearts from being troubled.

Second, we know the way. Where is heaven? Just to be clear, heaven is not “up there.” You could travel throughout the universe were it possible and still not find it. Perhaps heaven exists in another dimension of time and space we can’t access. If you’ve ever

watched Carl Sagan teach on this when he was alive, or seen the movie *Interstellar*, or watched the show *Stranger Things*, then you have some idea of how another dimension might somehow exist yet we would be unable to perceive it.

We don't know where heaven is, and it doesn't matter, because *we know the way*. John 14:4-7: ⁴ And you know the way to 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 had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

To be clear, Jesus is *not* saying, "I know the way to God. I know the way to heaven." If he did, he would only be claiming to be a prophet, like Moses, like Mohammad, like the Buddha, someone who has seen things and has knowledge to share with you. If all Jesus said was, "I am the way," maybe you could take it that way. But he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

"I am the truth." Jesus says that he is the Word, the divine *logos* [lah-gahs] that created the universe and orders it and sustains it. He is God in the flesh walking among the people. Jesus Christ is the self-revelation of God. He took on flesh so that we could know him and thereby know God. And Jesus says, "I am the life." In other words, he says, "There is no life to be had apart from me; I am the author of all life. If you want to truly live, you must feed on me. Your soul will shrivel and die apart from me."

No prophet, no leader of any major world religion, ever said anything like this. Jesus claims to be God. It's even more clear in verses 8-10: ⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? 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?" John 14:8-10a.

Jesus is God, the creator and sustainer of the universe who took on flesh. I love how one commentator put it: "John [in chapter thirteen of his gospel] had actually leaned on Jesus' bosom; and the love that throbbed in every heartbeat he heard was the love of God ... And never to all eternity, not even amidst the full blaze of God's external glory in heaven, would [the disciples] discover something different in the heart of God from what Jesus had shown them." David Gooding, *In the School of Christ*, 87-88.

Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except through me." We know the way to our heart's true home, and that keeps our hearts from being troubled.

But of course it's on this very point that so many people get upset with Christianity. They hear us talk about Jesus and they say, "How dare Christians say that? This is a big world with a lot of different takes on spirituality. How can Christians be so sure that every other religion on the planet is wrong and they are right? That's so exclusive and narrow-minded!"

If you're here today and you are not a believer in or a follower of Jesus Christ and that's one of your big objections, first of all welcome – we are so grateful that you are here. And there is just about nothing I'd rather do than sit down and talk with you about your objections to Christianity, hear your perspective, and try to give you some responses.

If that person with that objection is here, I want you to know you are absolutely right about Christianity being exclusive. The historic Christian faith, which we hold to at Grace Bible, says there is no salvation or hope outside of Jesus Christ. But of course, if Jesus is who he said he is, if he is very God of very God, then that must be the case. If God did reveal himself completely and totally in Jesus, *what other way of salvation could there be?* Christianity has to be exclusive if we are to be faithful to what Jesus taught.

But that doesn't make Christians narrow-minded. You know if someone says, "I have found a cure for cancer," that claim is either right or wrong, but it's not narrow-minded. And when Christians say, "Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life – you cannot get to God except through him," it's either right or wrong, but it's not narrow-minded.

Yet I know that for many people outside of Christianity it doesn't feel that way at all, and understandably so. If a doctor at M.D. Anderson over in Houston says, "I have found the cure for cancer," people sit up, they take note, they pay attention, because this person has credibility. He's devoted his life to finding the cure. But all too often when Christians say that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, we have no credibility with those around us. Why do you think that is?

Listen, if you are here this morning and you are a Christian and you work hard to talk to people about Jesus, then I am very hesitant to say anything that could be even be perceived as critical. I know most Christians never try to do evangelism. So I'm tempted to tell you to close your ears.

First of all, it's all too obvious to people that we haven't given our lives to the gospel like the researcher has given his life to trying to cure cancer. Therefore, we have the same credibility. But more than that – in the south we have a mindset that *we can do evangelism on the cheap.*

But more than that, we've been taught that we can just tell people about Jesus without really trying to love them and serve them and that's enough. We don't have to open our lives up to people who don't believe, we don't have to be vulnerable with them – so long as we've vomited out a gospel presentation then we've done our job. No wonder we come off as narrow-minded. When it comes to evangelism we *are* narrow-minded. We are narrowly focused on getting this information across to them, but we don't care enough to slow down and learn about and really love the people we're giving the information to. We don't care about getting to know them, or what they think, or their problems, or how they've been hurt by the church in the past. All too often our few attempts at evangelism are just exercises in trying to win an argument.

That's not what Jesus did in evangelism, nor was it what the apostle Paul did. "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of

God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” 1 Thessalonians 2:8. He shared the gospel *and* himself.

It’s pretty bold I think for a church to use certain words in the church name. A safe church name is “First So-and-So Church of Oxford.” That church isn’t really making any claim about itself and what it’s offering people. But a church that has the word “Life” in it – that church is making a claim about itself – it’s offering life to people. Or, frankly, a church that has the word “Grace” in it. That’s pretty bold. Are we extending grace to people? Or do we just want to win the argument?

In Jesus Christ God came to earth as a man and he got close to people. He loved people. He made himself knowable, made himself vulnerable, made himself killable. Are we willing to do the work to open up our hearts and homes and love people enough to let them get close to us and still tell them about our exclusive Jesus?

Yes, Christianity is exclusive, but Christianity is the only religion on the planet that in its exclusivity has at its heart a man loving and dying for his enemies. He went to the cross to bear our sin and shame so that we could be reconciled to God in Him. And when you know him, you will have peace. “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7. Friends, Jesus is the way, the truth, the life; he has prepared a place for you. Let not your hearts be troubled. AMEN