

**SERMON: "WORKING ON THE HOUSE"**  
**TEXT: NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 7:55-60**  
**NEW TESTAMENT JOHN 14:1-14**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For some reason this passage from John's gospel got me thinking about real estate. It could be the reference to our father's house having many rooms or how Jesus talks about preparing a place. Or it could be that Beth and I are thinking lots about real estate these days. We sold the snow blower. Now we just need to sell our house –

Thinking and talking about real estate, you know what they say?  
It's all about what? Location. Location. Location.

There is some of that in these verses from John, questions of where  
There's good news on that front, including what might be understood as a reference to the square footage of God's house. Sounds spacious. Plenty of rooms ... and plenty of room to add on.

Reading and praying through these verses it sounds to me like the good news here isn't just location or square footage, questions of where ... it is the question (and answer) of relationships. 'With' more so than 'where.'

**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 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? 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.**

Jesus prepares a place for us so that we might be where? With him!  
If you're still thinking location, you might picture this  
Think about our Father's house as a big old grand hotel with lots of rooms  
And picture a hotel room, one with those adjoining rooms. With him!  
Key verse – **"so that where I am, there you may be also"**

The context in which Jesus speaks these words about being with him may help us hear his words with greater clarity – with our hearts as well as our ears. He says this to his disciples on the night he will be betrayed. They know something is amiss. They know he will not be with them much longer. They are worried.

## WITH YOU

Chapters 13-17 of John are what the scholars call the 'Farewell Discourse'  
It is Jesus saying what needs to be said to the people closest to him  
Parents, you might think of telling your child everything you think they need to  
hear (usually something you've said many times before) as you hug  
their neck and send them off to college or a new job in another town

Jesus is preparing his followers for when he is not with them in person  
so he is letting them know he will be with them 'in person' in other ways  
In chapter 13 he washed their feet, showing them what it means to serve  
At the same time, he gives them a new commandment, a mandate,  
to love one another. In this chapter, he talks about preparing a place

And he will, later in this chapter, talk about the comforter, the Holy Spirit  
being with them, giving them peace. Then in chapters 15-16, he talks about  
how he is connected to his followers like a vine and its interwoven branches  
Then in chapter 17 he prays for them.

See how this is like that talk with parents and their child all grown up  
Moms and Dads going on and on with love and wisdom saying the same  
few really important things in multiple ways like a sermon with three points  
that just goes on and on and on. Well intentioned and wordy

That's what Jesus is doing here - saying two things. One, "I'm going away."  
And two, "I will always be with you. I've started working on a place at our  
parent's place with adjoining doors where we will be together. Promise!"

Jesus was saying this to a people he loved who were looking ahead  
and who were scared ... scared by all sorts of things. What about Rome?  
What about the religious leaders who love their rules, and putting people  
in their supposed place with those rules? What about me, about us  
what happens when I mess you, when we mess up?

Know anybody like that? Replace Rome with Russia, Iran or our own leaders  
Replace Pharisees with Christian nationalists or profiteering preachers  
Replace Peter and Thomas with you and with me. Same answer from Jesus  
I'm going on ahead, preparing a place for you. And I am with you.

Jesus began by talking about a place, a house he's working on  
a place with plenty of rooms (A Place for Everyone, you might say)  
Sounds very much like I place we'd like to go – a destination  
Thomas hears about that destination and asks for directions

**Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going.  
How can we know the way?"**

## DIRECTIONS

Jesus answers Thomas' honest question letting him, letting us know that he, Jesus, is both the destination (he's preparing a place) and the direction (so where I am, you may be also)

**Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."**

Rev. Bob Roof faithfully served this church as pastor for 25 years. There is no doubt in my mind that this place being "A Place for Everyone" has his fingerprints all over it. He had a most welcoming way about him. He retired in 1990. I was privileged to lead his memorial service in 2021

As he was got closer to death, we talked about what he wanted for his funeral. He was adamant about one thing he wanted in his service – actually what he did not want. He wanted this passage from John to be read but not all of it. He asked me to leave out the phrase, 'no one comes to the Father except through me.' I agreed

Bob's argument, paying attention to the context, is that his verse is not meant to serve as a velvet rope or check-in desk as in ... 'this is what you have to do to check in', your pass, like some kind of barcode  
The focus of these verses is being included in a place with many rooms  
It is not a hurdle to be cleared. It is not an exam to be passed

It is an invitation in because it is an invitation along ... "I'm with him."  
Everything Jesus is saying in this farewell discourse is about relationships  
Jesus being one with the Father, us being with him. To a people whose faith has been about keeping the rules, getting it right ...  
this is a gift. It is an opening. It is Jesus saying, "I got you."

Jesus is the destination. Jesus is the directions too  
And the really good thing about Jesus being the directions? It is not ...  
directions with small print, parts A through Z and a weird little wrench.  
Not directions like "turn left at the Old Smith Place" when and where the Old Smith Place is now a smoothie place

The 'directions' Jesus offers are an invitation, "Come with me"  
This passage is about comfort, Jesus still being connected with us,  
Not about conditions ... not this is what you have to do to get to heaven

## SUMMARY

Some bible passages get twisted into holy hand grenades used to prove how right I am and how wrong they are, to lock people out. Bob Roof didn't want the message of his memorial service to be about what someone else supposedly has to do to earn God's favor. He wanted his memorial, like his ministry, to be about God's love.

I tried to honor that not only with his service but in my ministry following up on and building up on his, a ministry that over and over again has been and is about letting all God's people know that there are plenty of rooms in our Father's house (with room to add on) ... A Place for Everyone

So to add on to that ... with a focus on the fact that Jesus is where we are. And we are, by and through his grace, where he is. About that place. It is not just about the 'hereafter.' It is about the here and now. Here and now speaking to our day and time, our world, our worries.

About that ...

I was emailing back and forth with a friend about something else. Her last email included this wisdom ... which I think fits this passage and Jesus' "I am with you message" to a 't.' She ended her email with ...

I love this Thomas Merton quote...I try to live with the same humility.

*"I am content that these pages show me to be what I am – noisy, full of the racket of my imperfections, and the wide-open wounds left by my sins. Full of my own emptiness. Yet, ruined as my house is, You live there."*