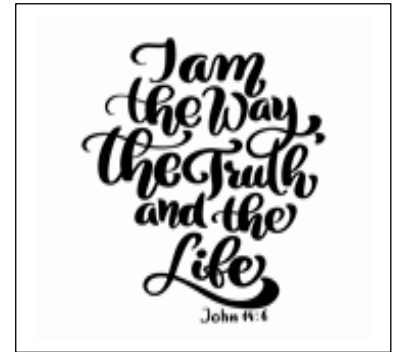


Faith Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Sunday, May 10, 2020
Fifth Sunday of Easter



Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

Almighty God, Your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give us grace to love one another, to follow in the way of His commandments, and to share His risen life with all the world, for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

(from the Fifth Sunday of Easter, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Readings and Psalm

- **Acts 7:55-60** *The martyrdom of Stephen*
- **Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16** *Into your hands, O LORD, I commend my spirit. (Ps. 31:5)*
- **1 Peter 2:2-10** *God's people chosen to proclaim God's mighty acts*
- **John 14:1-14** *Christ the way, truth, and life*

The Holy Gospel according to John 14:1-14, NRSV

(<https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#texts>)

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

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on this Fifth Sunday of Easter. Amen.

Our home holds a special place in our hearts. Yes, they are only material but a place where we can seek shelter from the storm. Or, as in today, the coronavirus.

When I was younger, my sister and I had a dollhouse. It was a two-story, two-bedroom, one-bath home with a kitchen and a very spacious living room. There was a fireplace painted on one wall in the living room and the fire was always roaring. A family of four could fit comfortably in there. Over the attached garage was a veranda. The construction was painted metal with painted bricks and white plastic shutters adorning the outside. It was a lovely home.

As I was typing this and recalling what I remember it looking like, I googled “1960’s dollhouse”. My goodness! The exact same dollhouse that we had as young girls was pictured on the internet! Wonderful memories flooded my heart and my eyes! My first thought was that I wanted one of them again. Then reality sunk in as I wondered, why? What would I ever do with a dollhouse? I restrained the whim to purchase.

I remember my sister and I playing with the dolls and dollhouse, the furniture and the car our parents got us so there would be something to put it in the garage. I recall rearranging the furniture and thinking how wonderful it would be to live in that dollhouse. If only it was life-size!

The home I grew up in is a three-bedroom, one-bath home. It’s on the market again, and when I look at the pictures now, I wonder how six kids and two parents all fit in there.

Now I live in a one-story, three-bedroom, one-and-a-half bath home in Newberry. It is the church’s parsonage and has a nice kitchen with a pantry cupboard, a lazy Susan built in the lower corner cupboard, a dining room, a spacious living room and a laundry room. There is a basement under the entire home. The garage is attached but, for some reason, you can’t get to the garage without going outside. I still haven’t figured that one out.

This beautiful home is just the right size. Actually, I am very blessed because it is bigger than what I need but, with a husband now, there is ample room where we each have our own space.

My future-retirement home is in the woods outside of Curtis. It’s a log home on ten acres. It is a very spacious and also a beautiful home with plenty of yard for my husband’s daylilies, the chickens and very soon more baby chicks, and a future garden.

Now that we have turned the water on so that, well, I don’t have to go out in the woods, I’m looking forward to spending more time out there, especially since traveling from one home to another is now allowed. I long to sit on the front porch glider, sip a cup of coffee or tea, and listen to the birds sing.

Each one of these homes have a story. Your home, or the place where you now reside, has a story. You may or may not know the entire story of your home, depending on how long you’ve lived in it.

I think the most interesting part of the story isn't the building itself, but those who built their lives inside it. For each of the homes I mentioned, I recall many good memories and fun times. I also recall heartaches and difficult times that were a part of growing up and living in that home at that time. I used to think they were all permanent homes. They weren't. I'm hoping my retirement home will eventually be my permanent home – for a time, anyway.

The gospel reading today is one that I've shared many times at funerals. I've shared this version that uses the term dwelling places and I've used the version which says, "In my Father's house are many rooms."

Many years ago, after one particular funeral service, a young boy, about 8 years old with six siblings, came up to me at the dinner afterwards. He said, "Pastor, you said there are many rooms in heaven, right? Does this mean I FINALLY get my OWN room?" He certainly was excited!

What will our heavenly home look like? Will we each have our own room? Will we have crosses and pictures of Jesus hanging on the walls like we have in our homes now? (I kind of doubt that.) Will there be kitchens to cook in and living rooms to visit in? Bedrooms to sleep in?

Will there be flowers planted outside and rainbows and sunshine every day? Wait, will there be snow? After all, we live in the U.P. and many people refer to this as "God's Country". There are numerous items-shirts, bumper stickers, coffee cups, and much, much more-with the logo "God's Country" printed on them. So, will there also be snow in heaven?

We don't know those answers and, frankly, we won't know those answers until we walk on. We are assured, though, that Jesus is preparing our home, our *final* home, our *eternal* home, for us. It is a home that is shaped and molded by God's love. And the best part about this? There is plenty of room! Whether your translation says dwelling places or rooms or uses any other term, Jesus says there are MANY areas for us! You won't be left out! I won't be left out! There is room for us all!

John 14 brings comfort and peace to those who are mourning. Especially at funerals, we share the promise of eternal life with Christ and visions of our heavenly home, a home large enough for all. And we offer words to reassure that one should never be afraid for we are never alone.

John 14 is also so relevant now. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in Me." In times such as these, when we are still in the midst of a global pandemic, it is Christ we turn to. Christ is the calm in the midst of our storms, peace in the midst of our worries, and hope in our times of despair.

Just a couple of years before I moved up here, I reconnected with the young boy, then a young man, who asked if he would have his own room in heaven. I shared Revelation 7:9 with him which says, "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages..." I told him that I didn't believe he would have his own room but that he would be very happy and surrounded by a *lot* of people who love him, including Jesus. He seemed satisfied with that answer. May you be also. **Amen.**

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *A brief silence.*

Build us up, mothering God, as living stones united in Your spiritual house. Continually strengthen Your church as it is sent forth to proclaim Your love. We pray especially for new congregations and those in redevelopment.

Humble us, Creator God, as part of Your creation. Fill us with respect and awe for the world You have made, including volcanoes, ocean currents, tropical rainstorms, glaciers, and other forces that both destroy and create.

Align our ways to Your love, O God. We pray for countries, leaders, and other organizations as they prepare places for those seeking refuge and safety.

God of healing and rest, help those whose hearts are heavy and weighed down by many troubles. Comfort their suffering, ease their distress, and carry their burdens. We pray for all who are ill in body, mind, and spirit, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices....(please name your prayer concerns). Bring comfort and strength to all affected by the coronavirus. We pray for adequate testing and the hope of a vaccine to come. Bless all scientists and doctors who work towards a cure.

Nurturing God, we pray for those who tend and teach young children, for the safe pregnancies of expectant parents, and for families who struggle with infertility and miscarriage. We give thanks for all who have shown mothering care, and we remember all for whom this day is difficult.

Generous God, You call into Your brilliant light all who have died. Give us faith to take hold of the promise of Your eternal life.

With bold confidence in Your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into Your eternal care; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (prayers from the Fifth Sunday of Easter, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to serve our Risen Lord! **Thanks be to God!**