

All Saints

5 Easter, 2023

APRIL 7, 2023

Within the Gospel story for today Jesus tells his disciples that he is going away. He's leaving to prepare a place for them and not to worry as this mysterious place has many rooms or in some translations dwelling places. They don't even need a map, directions, a guide or a GPS to find it because they already know the way. As more often than not they're confused and need a lot clearer and down to earth explanation.

If this passage sounds familiar to some of you it may be because I read most of the same Gospel, a little over a week ago, at Joyce Roy's memorial service. The reading is one of five possible selections from the Gospel of John that the prayerbook recommends for use at funeral and memorial services.

The American writer Bill Bryson, who lived for a time down the road in Hanover, is probably better known in England where for years he wrote a weekly newspaper column. In his book titled, *At Home*, he describes a house he purchased for his family in the southeast of England that used to be a church rectory. The book goes on to describe each room in the house from top to bottom with witty speculation as to how each room was used by the people who lived in them over the decades.

The book also has quite a bit to say about the life of simple country rectors who had lived in the house over the years, most of which is not very flattering.

On a side note, Bryson looks at the church, located on the same property as the newly purchased rectory. While he's talking with a local archeologist he's asked if he thinks by looking at the church that it might be sinking? One side of the building appears to be 3 feet higher

than the other giving that tilted look. What's really happening is the higher side of the property contains the burying ground adjacent to the church. A country parish of this size would have supported 2-350 people who over time would have generated more like a thousand laid to rest in this spot over a century. Multiply this over the years and there could easily be more that 200,000 souls interred next to the church, raising the ground one body at a time.

These hands of mine have been used to building and creating rooms and dwelling places for myself and others for over 60 years. It's something that I've done throughout my life as one of the many talents God has given me. This morning's readings seem to me to have a lot to say about the places we live or would like to live.

Our psalm calls our Lord a refuge, a strong rock and a castle to keep us safe. 1st Peter implores us to become a spiritual house to come and invite Jesus as a living stone. He uses the analogy of Jesus being the cornerstone for our building. Within the Gospel too, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them with many rooms. We also began the 10 o'clock service singing the Churches One Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord.

The New Testament has many a reference to earthly rooms and places. Jesus is born in a stable. A crippled man is lowered through the roof of a building by his friends so he can be healed. The last supper is held in the upper room. We are urged to shut the door as we pray to our Father in secret. Again 1st Peter calls us to build a spiritual house while Jesus tells us he's going to prepare a place for you and me.

While I may have earned my living building homes and rooms for people to call home, I've also built other spaces I'm not too proud of. It's my belief that all of us are capable builders of rooms and dwelling

places some good and others not fit for habitation, yet we build them just the same.

We start our building construction projects like any other, from the bottom up, only we're sometimes like the man who builds his house on sand instead of bedrock. It's only, when the challenges of life hit us hard that our homes, built on a sandy base, look like the ones that slide down those California cliffs into the sea. We use inferior material in place of quality stuff when we only contact God on those occasions when it's Christmas or Easter and then fool ourselves thinking we're faithful. Sometimes the plans get read wrong and the rooms we create are actually prison cells, dark and impenetrable, locking us in through addictions of various bad behaviors. The electrical system won't work and darkness surrounds us.

The homes we find ourselves in sometimes get built way beyond anything that's practical or necessary. Last month, it struck me, walking by the Mc-mansions surrounding the golf courses I played in Plymouth Ma. how wasteful these giant homes are. One only has to look at the evening news to see how poorly most of the people in the rest of the world we live in and share, get by. Even locally there is a shortage of affordable places in which to live.

The tools we use in construction are the same in our hands as those of a master skillful builder, but they may not produce the desired good results. Instead of nails our hammers of hate pound brothers and sisters who look and live different from ourselves. I once worked with a guy that had no bubbles in his level, of course he was never wrong. Our rulers sometimes have different numbers when others don't measure up to our perceived standards.

The saws of fear cut deeply in those we distrust because they don't think the same as you and I. We drill down deeply boring holes in relationships with families and friends. A dull plane will not cut away smoothly the past slights and hard feelings of life but instead chatter and crack any hope of reconciliation. It's too easy to chisel our way with axes of shady business dealings. Like any toolbox there's a proper way and a wrong way to use the tools we've been given.

So where does all this leave us on a spring Sunday morning in Northern NH? Jesus, a couple of thousand years ago, left his disciples to question just where he might be going on ahead to prepare a place for them, and us. He tells them that he is the way the truth and the life and that seeing him is the same as seeing God. Not quite sure of these words? how about believing in the signs, wonders and healings they've been witness to. If it's so hard to believe for those who had the good fortune to walk with Jesus on this earth, what about us?

Let's start with the last line of the Gospel. If you ask for anything in my name, I will give it to you. The Disciples, at this point hadn't received the Holy Spirit, we're one up on them. Jesus knows that we are but dust with all its grubbiness, but through grace we have a path to glory and a place prepared for us in the heavenly realms. If Jesus can convert Saul, from someone who has a hand in the stoning of Steven, to the new life as St Paul there's hope for us if we only ask and believe.

What's that place like, we'll have to wait and see but I'm convinced that every now and then we get a little sneak peek. Quiet breathtaking sunrises and sunsets light the way. The touch of a hand, a hug, smile or laugh from someone you love. The unexpected note in the mail from someone. The news from your doctor that your illness is gone. The satisfaction in knowing you've made a difference, for good, in someone else's life.

You and I will do works greater than we can ask for or imagine when we place our faith, our lives, in Jesus' hands. Our reward, deserved or not by our own standards, will be in that place he's gone on to prepare for us when the time comes.

Long before Jesus birth the prophet Isaiah gave the world a picture of what our heavenly rooms will look and feel like, please open your prayer books to page 87, to the 3rd song of Isaiah, for that preview.

Arise shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you. For behold darkness covers the land, deep gloom enshrouds the peoples, but over you the Lord will rise, and his glory will appear upon you.

Nations will stream to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawning. Your gates will always be open, by day or night they will never be shut. They will call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the holy one of Israel.

Violence will no more be heard in your land, ruin or destruction within your borders. You will call your walls salvation and all your portals praise.

The sun will no more be your light by day, by night you will not need the brightness of the moon. The Lord will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory.

Sounds like a pretty good place to spend eternity!! Amen