

Message: God Makes a Home in Us**Where’s your home?**

You all know the expression “your home is where your heart is.” When we think about home, we aren’t just thinking about a place or a building, but the people who live, or lived, there. For many of us, home is where we live now. It’s a place of comfort, safety and security. We love and are loved by the people who live there with us. God is present.

For others, home is a memory. It’s a treasured time in our lives from the past, when we were with those who we loved. Our loved ones are no longer present. We’re separated by time, distance or death. Yet the memory of our shared life stays with us. It can lift our spirits and remind us of the promise of the days to come, when we will be reunited with them. God was present then and is present now.

There are those for whom home is a future hope. Some people didn’t or don’t have loving parents or peaceful households. Conflict, abuse or neglect is all too common. Loneliness doesn’t make us feel comfortable, safe or secure. There are many people who are marginalized, made to feel less valuable, less welcome, unlovable and untouchable, voiceless and invisible. There are those who are in prison – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. They’re hoping for a future day, dreaming of a place they can call home where they will love and be loved. God is present now and will be present then.

There’s a common thread in all human situations. God wants to make a home with us. That’s one of the things our Scripture from John 14 tells us. God uses love and grace as the means to do so. The wonderful thing about God’s grace is that it doesn’t depend on us. We don’t have to earn it. We aren’t entitled to it. We can’t put limits and conditions on it. God’s grace just is. The very nature and essence of God’s grace changes us when we encounter it. A new definition we learned during our midweek service is this: grace is “aggressive forgiveness.”¹ We need it.

Voices of the world and our self-speak are usually negative.

We hear things like “you’re a failure ... irresponsible ... worthless ...

¹ Max Lucado, *Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine*, 2014, chapter 2

incapable ... overweight ... dumb ... a loser.” That’s the power of the lies that evil speaks. These are false. They only have power over us if we give it to them.

God’s voice gives life. God says, “You’re my beloved child ... my sheep ... worthy ... valued ... more than conquerors ... you ROCK!” God loves you more than you can possibly imagine. No matter what you’ve thought, said or done, there’s nothing that can keep you from God’s love. God forgives us, over and over and over again. All we have to do is turn to God, ask and be willing to receive God’s love.

That’s why God “making a home” with us is so important (v23). God making a home in us is how God cares for us and makes us into what we can become: those who are the very image of Christ. God making a home in us is also a way of preparing and equipping us to be sent to others as agents of love and grace. That’s the active part of God’s blessing. When we show hospitality by welcoming visitors and strangers in our homes, lives and hearts; we’ve got it. This is an act of communal living, gathering together to live, grow and help with each other’s burdens. We find God present when we open ourselves to the messiness of each other’s lives in a non-judgmental, loving way. That’s a reflection of God’s home.

Henri Nouwen wrote about an inward, outward, upward movement toward God. It goes like this. When we look inside ourselves, we find God in our hurts, flaws, feelings and fears. God made us the way we are so we would need God. There’s nothing wrong with us. God loves us just the way we are. Turning outward, we find in others similar hurts, flaws, feelings and fears. God is present in them, too. That’s because God loves them as much as God loves us. Joining together, we reach upward toward God. That’s where we experience a bond, a connection, a joy of mind, body and spirit that we don’t experience in other places or by other means. No matter where you begin: going to God, seeing God in others or finding God inside, God is present.²

God makes community holy when we connect in spiritual ways. That’s when God’s Spirit, the Helper, Advocate or Spirit of truth, is

² Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, 2986

present and at work within us. There’s good news: God is always adding onto the house! Maybe your soul is ready for some remodeling. Perhaps the small, one-room heart you have is too small for the Spirit and what God has planned. It may be time for a new addition.

All three persons of God come and make a home with those who keep Jesus’ words. God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer is present with us when we receive the grace of Christ. The fullness of God comes to live inside us when we commit ourselves to loving Jesus. God living in us changes us, from the inside-out. We begin living in a new way. We begin living in the way Jesus told us to live.

What did Jesus say? First, he revealed his identity as our Savior, so we knew we could trust and believe God. That’s the good news. The second part Jesus revealed is that keeping his word means intentionally living a life of love: first, love of God; second, love for our neighbors; third, love for each other. The full scope and depth of love is so great, so radical and counter-cultural that we become people who are known for loving even our enemies and those who oppress us for what we believe. That kind of love is like super glue. It bonds us together in relationships that can’t be broken.

That’s what the African concept of *ubuntu* is. It’s what the ancient Greeks called *koinonia*. That’s the spirit of togetherness and connection we find in community inside and outside the walls of our church. The South Africa saying is “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” – “*I am, because you are.*” We are who we are through other people. Once we get past the harshness and superficial things of life, we find humans are the same, deep down. We have needs and wants, hopes and dreams, trials and temptations. We seek joy and peace. We sense the spiritual side of life and want to embrace it. The best way to do so is to make a home with others in the same way God makes a home with us.

Making a home with God is a communal experience. John Wesley called it social holiness. We’re called to gather together with others. When we do so and believers are present, God is present. God’s Spirit resonates with the spark of life, the spirit God breathed into each of us when we came to life. When we share spiritual experiences with others, they are powerful. Lives are changed. People become better.

We are marked as people who are filled with God’s Spirit.

That’s God’s gift to those who live by Jesus’ words.

What happens when we keep Jesus’ words (v24)? First of all, there’s great news. You can only keep Jesus’ words if you’ve heard Jesus’ voice calling you! Halleluia. Next, you’ll find yourself drawn, prompted or led to act. Love and grace aren’t passive. They move. They’re active.

You’ll find yourself drawn to some new practices. We hear God’s voice when we read, study and meditate on God’s Word, the Bible. We reflect on the human experience of God captured in it’s pages. We learn from it and are inspired, encouraged and challenged by it.

That’s not all. We’ll find ourselves led to engage with other people. We’ll marvel at the ways God is present that can’t be captured in words on a page. When we’re with other people who follow Jesus, there’s a special connection, a spiritual bond that lifts our spirit. We feel better. We feel like we can be ourselves. We find ourselves drawn into conversations about spiritual things, which is unique in all the world.

We also find ourselves sent to share God’s message with the world: Jesus came to save us. He showed us a new, healthier way to live. That’s the mission Jesus gave us. We’re to spread the word with love and care, in ways that connect with others, not with the harshness of rules, rights and wrongs, but to invite, connect and engage others in relationship and in prayer.

As we gather on this Sunday before Memorial Day, my prayer for each of you and your household is that you would experience God in a real, tangible way as you gather to remember those who sacrificed. May your spirit be at peace. God is always present. Recognize God in the moment and look for the ways grace is at work. Take each moment - good or bad, to look for God. When you do, you’ll find something surprising: God is at home in you. Amen.

Let us pray ...

Lord of Life, thank you for the grace which you pour out on us, your blessing and favor. Forgive us when we turn away and do not accept or acknowledge your love. Help us to show hospitality to those we fear. Give us open hearts for those who challenge our prayers. Give us the courage to pass the blessings you give on. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

John 14:22-29 (CEB)

Judas (not Judas Iscariot) asked, “Lord, why are you about to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?”

Jesus answered, “Whoever loves me will keep my word. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever doesn’t love me doesn’t keep my words. The word that you hear isn’t mine. It is the word of the Father who sent me.

I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid. You have heard me tell you, ‘I’m going away and returning to you.’ If you loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than me. I have told you before it happens so that when it happens you will believe.”