

JOHN 14:1-14
DIVINE HOSPITALITY

We're in the Upper Room; it is a precious place to be because Jesus is there and we're with Him! We watched Him wash our feet, and that was a bit uncomfortable seeing Jesus as a menial servant with a basin and a towel but we got past that! We shared the Passover together and that was special, though He did speak about the bread and wine as His body and blood, as if He was going to die soon! Then it got scary: He started speaking to Judas about betrayal as if Judas was going to turn Him in and Judas left in a hurry; we're not quite sure why! Jesus spoke about going away and we tried to find out where He was going; Peter said He would go anywhere with Jesus, even lay down His life, to which Jesus replied that Pet would deny Him, even disown Him three times! It is getting too much for us, all of this; it's frightening; the good thing we had with Jesus is now under threat; are we going to lose Him? There is a sense of fear and anxiety in the air; we don't like it!

For all sorts of different reasons, but there are lots of people in our world who live life being frightened and anxious. Stress is an experience that lots of people live with and it is not the stress that sparks energy and activity; this is the stress that brings people down and almost paralyses them; they can do nothing because they are frightened, they are anxious about everything they do. There is a great long list of phobias that people experience, things that we might laugh at, but that are really quite serious for those who experience them. Others simply find life too much for them; they look at the world and wish they could hide away from it all, to go to live on a paradise island away from the news, and elections, and the pressures of everyday life. Those who are poor across the world have different fears: they are anxious about families, about their children growing up, about where will the next meal come from; how will their children get to be five or six years old? The reasons are different, but the reality of life under the skin has a similar feel to it, full of fear and anxiety.

Jesus' answer to our fears and anxieties is to paint a picture. "*In my...*" (*John 14:2*) There are different ways of understanding that picture: some people think that Jesus is talking about a whole lot of hotel spaces along a road, safe spaces, so that we move from one place to another along the road of life's journey and these safe spaces give us courage and hope to go further along the journey; Jesus is with us in all of these safe spaces. Jesus, the Way, goes with us as we go, guiding and leading us. I'm sure that all of that is true; Jesus does go with us everywhere and there are safe spaces for us all the way along. But that doesn't seem to be all that Jesus is saying here; there is an ultimate safe space that we call heaven. Some people would like to play down any idea of heaven; they see the kingdom of God as something to be lived out in this world and any thought of a world to come, an age to come beyond this one, is not something they take too seriously! They think that the notion of heaven distracts us from the real work of kingdom-building in our day-to-day world.

The plain way to take these words of Jesus, however, is to talk about heaven! "*In my...*" (*John 14:2*) Here is the ultimate safe space. The picture is of a house: the older versions say "mansion", with lots of rooms, and the implication is that here is a place for the disciples to be at home. "An Englishman's home is his castle!", a place where he can be safe and at home and nothing can bother him. It is the same kind of picture for Jesus' disciples. He is going away and they are scared by that idea, but when He goes He will be doing something good for them, preparing this place, this house, this safe space for them as their ultimate dwelling-place.

We're not told anything about what this "house" looks like. All the questions we want to ask are not answered. All that we are told is that living in this house we will be with Jesus. "*I am...*" (*John 14:2bf*) For people who are all frightened and anxious about the fact that Jesus is going away, people for whom His going away is an unmitigated disaster, here they are being promised that once again they will be with Jesus and will stay with Him forever. They will be

where Jesus is; this is their destiny; this will be their home. How do you picture “heaven”? Maybe you don’t! Certainly, it isn’t harp-playing on a fluffy cloud! All that we really know is that Jesus is there and we will be with Him and that will be our deep joy and ultimate blessing; there is nothing better than to be with Jesus and share in His glory.

It is a picture that is meant to give us courage and strength to live the life of faith and to persevere, to fight on! It is certainly not a distraction from real kingdom business! Do you know *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan’s complicated description of the Christian life in pictures of a journey? The end of the journey, heaven, is called the Celestial City, the place to which Christian and his friends are travelling. Along the way, they find all kinds of trials and distractions and it seems as if they will never get there. Just as they are beginning to think that the journey is never-ending they come to a place called the Delectable Mountains and from there they are given a view of the City, the place to which they are travelling and they see it in something of its glory and splendour. Having caught a glimpse of the city, on they go with new energy and zeal to get to journey’s end. Far from distracting them, they travel on with new purpose and desire, and with courage renewed.

I’m not sure what you make of the idea of heaven. For some, it is simply pie-in-the-sky, a wild idea of something good, but it’s not reality. Yet, it was reality for Jesus; the Bible speaks about the idea and that we will be with Jesus and that life will be perfect peace. All the things about life that disturb us now will be no more: no more sin, no more suffering or dying; all will be perfect peace in the glory of God. Our fathers used to sing lots of hymns that brought the idea of heaven into their minds and it was there, centre stage, for many Christians in way that it is not so much now! That’s a pity! Because here is the hope that Jesus gives to us, to His friends, that God has created a place, a safe space for us and we will be with Jesus and He will love us and we will worship Him forever and share His glory. That idea is meant to spur us on; it is meant to give us courage to deal with the struggles of life and faith, to give us new, fresh energy so that we can be people here and now, in this world, that God wants us to be. This is not meant to distract us, but to spur us on. The picture that Jesus paints is to give His frightened and anxious friends a sense of hope and courage and reassurance; it is a picture that did exactly that for them and had done the same for generations of Christians ever since. He is going away, but His going will produce hope, courage, reassurance and blessing.

“*Trust in...*” (*John 14:1*) The answer to anxiety is trust! Jesus’ friends were anxious and frightened; He is going to leave them; worse He is going to die! Their world is coming crashing down about them and they don’t know what to do next. So “*Trust...*” (*John 14:1*) The rest of this passage is all about Jesus discussing with His disciples what it means to trust Jesus and to trust the Father and that trusting the one means trusting the other because they are so totally linked and connected to one another. “*Philip said...*” (*John 14:8f*) Jesus tells them things about His relationship with God that He has never told them before; He tells them now so that their faith will be solidly based on the greatness, faithfulness and dependability of God. They are to trust the One who is totally worthy of their trust and as they put their trust in Jesus, so they put their trust in the whole power and might, love and grace of God Himself. The answer to their anxieties and fears, is to trust, to know that God has the whole thing in His hands.

Trust is hard. Jesus has made a promise and trust is our reaction to that promise. He has made the promise of a safe space in the house of the Lord; the promise that He will be there and that our safety and salvation is about being near to Jesus. He has made the promise that He will come back and that when He comes back this hope will be fulfilled. How do we react to these promises? The thing is, we find it hard to trust Jesus because other people we trust let us down. Because other people are fickle and changeable, we think about Jesus in the same way, that He is fickle and changeable too. But Jesus is totally trustworthy. He comes with all the power and faithfulness of God, with all the greatness and dependability of God on His side. He is totally worthy of our trust. The hope of heaven is not Jesus spinning a yarn that

will prove to be empty in the end. The hope of heaven is a promise that God has made to us and that God will complete for us and that His people will enjoy forever.

“I am...” (John 14:6) Here is another of these “I am” sayings. This one is all about dependability! Jesus is the way to God; we come to God through Him. Truth is all about being reliable, what He says is true; He is faithful. Life – “He embodies the indestructible life of the ever-living God” (Milne) If ever there is someone to trust in life it is Jesus. Everything about Him tells us that we can trust Him, that we can take His promises as they come. In a world where so much of what we hear and see breeds a lack of trust and creates fear and anxiety in our hearts – political life and the promises that we know will be either broken or set aside, leaders who create suspicion by the way they behave; a personal life that is full of fear and anxiety and stress that almost overwhelms us at times – where do we go? Where do we go to find peace, hope, courage, reassurance?

We find our hope, peace, courage, and reassurance in Jesus! He is with us every step of the way of our life; He is our safe space in a world full of turmoil; He promises us an ultimate safe space with Him in heaven, in the “Father’s house”. The challenge for us is to trust Jesus; is to believe these promises, and to let these promises infuse our whole being. When life makes us frightened and anxious, trust is the answer, the simple, yet profound answer!