



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

**Christ is Risen.....He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!**

John Todd was born in Rutledge, Vermont into a family of several children. They later moved to the village of Killingsworth back in the early 1800's. And there, at a very early age, John had both his mother and father die, and he was left without parents.

The relatives wondered what they would do with the number of children, how they could parcel them out to friends and relatives. One dear and loving aunt said she would take little John. The aunt sent a horse and a slave to get John who was only six at the time. The slave named Caesar, came and put the little boy on the back of the horse. On the way back an endearing conversation takes place:

John asks, "Will she be there?"

Caesar says, "Oh yes, she'll be there waiting up for you."

John: "Will I like living with her?"

Caesar, "My son, you fall into good hands."

John: "Will she love me?"

Caesar, "Ah, she has a big heart."

John: "Will I have my own room? Will she let me have a puppy?"

Caesar, "She's got everything all set, son. I think she has some surprises, John."

John: "Do you think she'll go to bed before we get there?"

Caesar, "Oh no! She will be sure to wait up for you. You'll see when we get out of these woods. You'll see her candle shining in the window."

When they got to the clearing, sure enough, there she was standing in the doorway with a candle in the window. She reached down, kissed him and said, "Welcome home! She fed him supper, took him to his room and waited until he fell asleep.

John Todd grew up to be a great minister of the Gospel. But it was there at his aunt's home, with her as his new mother, that he grew up. It was always a place of enchantment because of his aunt; it awed him that such a place of replacement existed. She had given him a second home. She had become a second mother to him.

Years later, long after he had moved away, his aunt wrote to say her own death was near. Her health was failing and she wondered what was to become of her. This is what John Todd wrote her:

"My dear Aunt, years ago I left a house of death not knowing where I was to go, whether anyone cared, whether it was the end of me. The ride was long but the slave encouraged me. Finally, he pointed out your candle to me and there we were in the yard, and there you stood embracing me and taking me by the hand into my own room that you had made up. After all these years I can't believe it, how you did all that for me; I was expected; I felt safe in that room, so welcomed. It was my room.

Now, it's your turn to go and as one who has tried it out, I'm writing to let you know, someone is waiting up, your room is all ready, the light is on, the door is open and as you ride into the yard, don't worry, Auntie. You're expected! I know. I once saw God standing in your doorway, long ago.

This story was retold by Rev. Billy Strayhorn. He heard it from another pilgrim while he was walking the Road to Emmaus.

Today we have another great reading from the Gospel of John. There is so much wrapped up in these 14 verses, it is almost hard to know where to start. This past week as I began to think about this passage what first stood out to me was the first sentence: "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Boy, oh boy, is that a fitting quote for today as we continue to face the Covid-19 epidemic.

Then a few verses later we hear Jesus say, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." WOW, John is so good at those "I am" statements. What could be more truthful? Jesus is the way, the pathway to God as He leads us into His kingdom. Jesus is the truth and we are set free by his wonderful act upon the cross. Jesus is the life, the life-giver if you will, so that we may have it abundantly.

Yes, through the centuries many Christians have validated Jesus' claims. When we follow Jesus, he promises have proven true. He delivers us from our false hope and terrible sin. He loves us a sinners and provides a way to the Father. And as he says, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

And truth as it is, why do we not grab hold of that statement? Jesus is the way to the Father. Jesus is "in the Father and the Father is in me" it says in verse 11. And so how do we understand this? And what does this have to do for our future, here on earth and in the after life?

Jesus came to earth not just to save us from our sin, ourselves, but also came to help us understand God. So why is this so hard? Easy answer is because we are human. Because we are too busy doing our "Own thing" and letting our world control our thinking? We think that our actions control our future. Well, the corona virus pandemic has given us a glimpse of the fact that, that is not always true.

Our truth comes in believing in God and believing also in Jesus. Faith is the only way our future will be secure. We hear that promise in the passage today. "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." The place Jesus is going is even bigger than our humanly limited image of heaven. I remember when I was little I would ask Grandma Brown where heaven was. She would always reply the same way, "Heaven is where God is." One time I was brave and finally asked her where hell was. She quickly replied, "Hell is where God is not!" Easy answers that I hold on to dearly today.

I don't know about you, but I want to go to my Father's house; to heaven where God is. Although in our reading for today, Jesus is telling us the truth He is also reminding the disciples that He will be leaving them soon. And He also is telling them that He will prepare a place for them and then return. Sounds a lot like

the crucifixion story, doesn't it? And what a special invitation it is, that Jesus will go and prepare a place for us to be with Him in His Father's house.

That to me is an awesome thought. Jesus will go and get things ready for me to arrive. He will come again, just as He did for the disciples. He returned to life in three days, remember. Jesus will come at the end of my life here on earth to take me to the place He has prepared for me. And Jesus will come again at the end of time. I look forward to the day when Jesus will take me home where He will be my Host for all of eternity in God's own house.

When I was in college, I brought my best friend home with me for Thanksgiving break. My mother took special care to prepare the guest room for my friend, to cook the meals my friend had told me she missed and to entertain her with many games of bridge every night. And I was actually a little embarrassed at my mother's attention to my friend's needs. Today, as I recall that long weekend, I realize that my mom was always the Hostess with the mostest! She wanted to please everyone and make them comfortable in her home, in her presence. What a gift she was to all who visited the Brown household.

And so I imagine that God will be the host with the most. He will be ready and waiting for us when we finish our life here on earth. We will be expected. It is true that there is a place for us in eternity, just as John Todd and his aunt found this to be most certainly true. A place where love abounds and opens arms to us.

And until then, we have only visions of that time and a foretaste of what is to come in the bread and wine. We get a glimpse and taste of the goodness of God at the communion table as we are filled with the bread of heaven. So, this morning, I pray that you will come and join us in the parking lot for Holy Communion, a feast prepared for you from Christ Himself. The table has been prepared for you. So come, all is ready, and you are expected! **AMEN**