

# "The Spacious House"

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First in a series on John 14

John 13:31-14:4

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For a few years now, I've been meandering through the Gospel of John. It's one of the four accounts of Jesus in our Bible. I'll explore a part of it, then put it aside. Today we're coming back to it.

We're at a point where Jesus is with his closest followers. It's their last time together before his death and resurrection. He has got important things for them. For us too.

Jesus has just finished — get this! — washing their feet. Our Master, our Teacher, our Lord has done this task that was reserved for folks at the bottom of society. He is serving us. It's breathtaking, and disorienting.

Then Jesus says one from among his closest will betray him. Who?

Now listen.

*When Judas was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Human One has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify the Human One in himself and will glorify him immediately. Little children, I'm with you for a little while longer. You will look for me—but, just as I told the Jewish leaders, I also tell you now—'Where I'm going, you can't come.'*

*"I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."*

Simon Peter said to Jesus, *"Lord, where are you going?"*

Jesus answered, *"Where I am going, you can't follow me now, but you will follow later."*

Peter asked, *"Lord, why can't I follow you now? I'll give up my life for you."*

Jesus replied, *"Will you give up your life for me? I assure you that you will deny me three times before the rooster crows."*

*"Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I'm going."*

II

What's going on here?

Our Lord has carried out — in that culture — a slave's task. He's washed our grimy feet.

He's saying one of us is about to betray him.

Peter, who seems so strong, to save his own skin is going to deny knowing Jesus.

Jesus is talking about going away, but we can't go with him, not yet.

Jumping ahead . . . very soon Jesus will be arrested. He'll be put through a sham trial. He'll be tortured. Condemned. Executed on a cruel cross. Jesus will be gone, ripped away.

III

Feel what this is already doing to them. And what will be churning inside them as they're dragged through the next hours and days.

There's a Greek word that's used here, *tarasso*. Agitated. Stirred up. Shaken.

Not many of us have been through that sort of experience, though I know some have. Still, can we imagine it? We've had our own experiences. We've been bewildered, things have crashed onto us, and we've been afraid. Not known what to do. No idea where to go. The signposts, the things we'd oriented our lives by, they were giving mixed-up directions, or maybe they were gone.

Shaken and stirred up. *Tarasso*.

This pandemic is different from what those first disciples were experiencing. It doesn't have the same moment-by-moment intensity. No, it's this long and getting-longer, drawn-out stretching, exhausting, numbing confusion and draining.

Shaken and stirred up. *Tarasso*.

When a marriage fractures apart.

When someone dies. My family is experiencing that this week, and as hard as it's been, we know it's just beginning.

Shaken and stirred up. *Tarasso*.

We're waiting for God to show up and calm things down. It's part of the God job-description, right? At least as we imagine it.

But Jesus, he's talking about going away somewhere, and without us!

IV

But listen to what Jesus says about this place he is going to.

He calls it his "Father's house."

There is one place Jesus has called his "Father's house." It's where his parents found him when he was a preteen and had wandered off. It's where he caused a near-riot, throwing out those who had made it their marketplace.<sup>1</sup> It's the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus' heavenly Father's House.

These people knew God is everywhere. God is the Creator of all that is everywhere, everything physical and spiritual, and God's presence fills all creation.

The Temple, though, was that most-thin place where heaven and earth overlapped,<sup>2</sup> and God's Presence was thickest.

This is where Jesus says he is going.

But reading ahead to what comes after, Jesus never goes to the Temple. He's been there before, many times, but in the hours before he dies, and even after his resurrection, he does not go back. What's he talking about, then?

Also, this promise he's giving to those first disciples, he's also giving to us. But the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed just forty years later. It's long gone. So we're not going there.

So what's his "Father's House" Jesus is talking about?

Some place that is Temple-like? Maybe it's a reality that Temple was pointing to, an existence that's thick with God's Presence.

Is it the heaven we can go to when we die? After all, this passage gets read all the time at funerals. I think so. Though maybe it's even more.

I wonder if it is when, in the fullness of time, God remakes all of creation, and everything is renewed and restored, and everywhere is God-filled in ways we, at this point, find unimaginable. After death, God gives us the beginning of experiencing it.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:49 and John 2:16.

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, John for Everyone, Part 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 58.

## V

What else does Jesus say about it?

It's spacious.

In the translation many of us are familiar with, it says "*In my Father's house are many mansions.*" That's the King James Version. To our ears, that can be misleading. We hear "mansion," and we think of huge homes where rich people live.

But in the King James days, the early 1600s, it did not have that meaning, not yet. "*Mansion*" simply meant a place to live.<sup>3</sup> That's why more current translations will say "many rooms" or "many dwelling places."

The idea is that this heavenly, and maybe earthly, God-filled reality is spacious. There will be plenty of room, more than enough. There is nothing cramped about it. There is nothing limited. There will never be a "No Vacancy" sign hanging out front.

In that Father-House Temple in Jerusalem, only a select few could go inside, the priests. And the most precious place, the "holy of holies," only one, the high priest, once a year.

In this picture Jesus is painting and promising, however, the Father's House will have plenty of room for everyone.

## VI

Remember Jesus says he is leaving? His death and his resurrection together, they are his departure. He is going to go ahead of those first disciples, and he has gone ahead of us. He's gone to get it all ready. When he completes his saving work, Jesus begins this new reality, this Father's House fullness.

Really, it's such a simple and beautiful picture. Jesus is the host, getting your place ready for you to arrive. He's setting it up perfectly for you. So you will right away be at home, home in a way you have never experienced before.

There is even more, though. It's not that Jesus has disappeared, and is off somewhere else while we're stuck here. He has sent his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, more of God's Presence, to comfort and companion us. By the Spirit, Jesus continues to be among us, and within us, leading us, teaching us, defending us, saving us.

And when the time is exactly right, he is going to move us into his Father's House. He's

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<sup>3</sup> See [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mansion](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mansion), and [www.etymonline.com/word/mansion](http://www.etymonline.com/word/mansion), and the discussions here [hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/13735/john-142-why-dwelling-places-in-nabre](http://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/13735/john-142-why-dwelling-places-in-nabre) and here [sharperiron.org/article/mansion%E2%80%9D-over-hilltop](http://sharperiron.org/article/mansion%E2%80%9D-over-hilltop).

not only setting up the place. He's loading the moving truck and driving us to the front door.

He's there, forever. We'll be there, forever.

I can't imagine what it's like.

I don't need to. All I need to know is that Jesus, beautiful Jesus will be there. Nothing can be any better than that!

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This is why, when they were together for that last supper, Jesus could say to them . . . and this is why Jesus can say to us when we're being shaken and stirred up, . . . "do not be troubled."

Remember that Greek word, *tarasso*?

Jesus says, "*Mē tarassesthō*." Do not be shaken. Do not be stirred up.

*"Trust God. Trust me (Jesus)."*

For even in the midst of your most troubled times, Jesus is preparing for you that spaciousness, that God-fullness, that with-God-home that is your home, perfect for you, with room to spare for us all.

He's promised it. He's already doing it.

So you can live in this peace, unshaken, unstirred.

Thanks to God. Amen.