

**John 14.1-6**  
**“It’s not the Place, it’s the Person”**

*This sermon was preached by Pr. Ned Lenhart on April 20, 2008 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI.*

How many of you can recall having...whether somewhere in your present or past...a special house? Your parents’ home...grandparents’...that of a favorite uncle or aunt? Some place where you remember family gatherings? Where there were lots of smiles...joy...laughter...where you always felt loved & welcomed? And were not just invited to be, but expected?

Every summer for as long as I remember, we traveled back from Montana to a small farm in Central Minnesota where my mother was raised. It had a big barn, a woods, a pond...everything a young boy could hope for! And every summer, during the week we were home, on a predetermined weekend the entire clan would gather at that farm where my grandmother would host what felt like, a weekend-long slumber party.

Picture this scene: an entire farm yard filled with dozens of enormous aunts & uncles (most of them were hog or dairy people); the men could be found mostly tending the barbeques & keeping the horseshoe pits in play. The women – the older women sat under the shade of the apple tree, visiting or singing hymns with their little brown Swedish hymn books...the younger women spent their time running between all the little ones running around the yard and the keeping pace with the going task of filling these long tables of food.

And there were the cousins – dozens of cousins. We played games up in the haymow, went swimming in the pond, prowled the woods with our bb guns. And in the midst of it all, there was grandma. The eternally peaceful presence – all 4’ 8” of her: directing traffic, welcoming her family, making it all happen.

A couple years after my grandmother moved into a nursing home the farm was sold. We were back in the area & when I saw the place from the road I just had to drive in & take one more look. The road to the farm had long since been plowed under, so parking the car on the road I made my way through the pasture and the overgrown yard, up the steps & in to the house. The door was open, so I walked inside. I don’t know what I was expecting, but the whole place felt

so incredibly empty...and so sad. The house I remembered as being so full of fun and good times...food & fellowship...now had nothing on the walls, no rugs on the floor, no smells coming from the kitchen, no light coming from the boarded up windows.

I stood in the middle of that big, empty old house and felt a deep sense of loneliness. And realized something: it was not the house that had brought me such joy. It was the people. It was not the place, but the person.

In today's Bible story from John 14, Jesus speaks these words to his disciples: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled."* Now remember the context here, while we are hearing these words today in the season of Easter, these were spoken during Holy Week: Maundy Thursday, to be exact. This is, "the night in which he was betrayed", the night before Jesus will die on a cross. For Jesus, a very difficult night: one of his 12 best friends will betray him, another will deny three times he ever knew him, and the other 10 will abandon him in his moment of greatest need! He's got plenty of things to be troubled about! Yet what does he counsel his followers? *"Do not let your hearts be troubled."* Why? Because, he says, *"I am going to go and prepare a place for you."* A place unlike any other: one where you and your loved ones can come and stay and feel welcomed...a place full of light and peace...a place where you can stay forever!

Thomas – he can't comprehend all that Jesus is saying, so he jumps in and asks: *"Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?"* And what does Jesus reply? *"I am the way!"*

'Thomas', says Jesus. 'It's not so much a place I'm talking about. It's a person...me! What I'm talking about isn't something a great distance from here – out in the future. What I'm talking about is now! That's why I taught you to pray, *'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.'* Because heaven starts now. The kingdom of God is now. When I said, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled,"* I didn't mean that your or my troubles are over. In some ways, they've just begun – at least on this earth. Because following me...it's hard work. What I'm

showing you, is a way. What I'm giving you, isn't as much a place, as it is a person. The creator of the universe, the almighty and ever-living God of all creation – now accessible to you...in me: Jesus.

My folks are in their late 70's; in fairly good health if you don't count my mom's bad knees & heart & liver & pancreas, or dad's bad heart & back & blood pressure. My sister, after visiting with my folks will sometimes call me to report that, "Yesterday was a Grandview Day". In other words, yesterday was hard for them. Grandview, I should explain, is the Assisted Living complex where my folks are planning to move to when taking care of their big old house in the country gets to be too much. They've been to Grandview, know the people there...know the staff...know the building & wing they like...and feel good knowing that when their, 'Grandview Days' start piling up, they've got a place...a home to go to...that's been prepared, just for them.

That's what today's bible reading is all about. Jesus promise to us that he has prepared a place for us. A place to go. And that place...is a person. Him.

What an incredible gift. To know that regardless of where it is in the world we go in answering God's call in our life...regardless of where it is we call home...regardless of what might happen to the home that we have now...should it be damaged or destroyed or God forbid, the bank have to take it away from us, we have a house where the paint won't peel, the shingles won't fly off in a storm...where the master is always present, where we will always find peace & welcome & love & forgiveness...where we will never, ever, ever...have to move out. A house that isn't a place...but a person. Who says: 'In my house there is room for all. Come & stay & live for ever.' Amen