

## A Place Prepared

John 14:1-14

It's almost graduation season and the end of the school year approaches. One of the most popular graduation gifts is the Dr Seuss book Oh, the Places You'll Go. It's a book about setting off on a new adventure and seeing it with wonder and awe. I want to share a few lines:

Congratulations!  
Today is your day.  
You're off to Great Places!  
You're off and away!  
You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
any direction you choose.  
You're on your own. And you know what you know.  
And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.  
You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care.  
About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there."  
With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet,  
you're too smart to go down any not-so-good street.  
And you may not find any  
you'll want to go down.  
In that case, of course,  
you'll head straight out of town.  
It's opener there  
in the wide-open air.  
Out there things can happen  
and frequently do  
to people as brainy  
and footsy as you.  
And then things start to happen,  
don't worry. Don't stew.

Just go right along.  
You'll start happening too.

It's a great message for graduations, because of all of the changes to come. Graduates may know at least initially what their plans are, but those plans may change, and lead to unexpected places.

It also has reminders that not all of the places we go are good, or the ones we want to be in. The book also warns of the Waiting Place.

You can get so confused  
that you'll start in to race  
down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace  
and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,  
headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.  
The Waiting Place...

...for people just waiting.  
Waiting for a train to go  
or a bus to come, or a plane to go  
or the mail to come, or the rain to go  
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow  
or waiting around for a Yes or a No  
or waiting for their hair to grow.  
Everyone is just waiting.

In today's Gospel lesson, we hear Jesus telling his disciples of the places he will go, and the places they will go, waiting to see what will come next. Changes that are coming their way. As they gathered for the Last Supper, Jesus tells them many things. He predicts that he will be betrayed. He predicts that the rest of the disciples will abandon him. He predicts that he

will die. And then he tells them that he is going to prepare a place for them.

When we hear this passage, we often think of a place in heaven. The King James Version of the Bible translated this promise of Jesus as “in my Father's house are many mansions.” We add that to our view of heaven, and think that we get a fancy place in heaven. If the streets are paved with gold and the walls are covered with jewels, then obviously the place we have there will be equally extravagant. And while we may have trouble imagining how all of the mansions are connected and arranged, we think that that’s what we’ve earned. That’s our just desserts. Jesus died, rose, and ascended, and even now is fluffing the pillows, setting out the towels, and preparing a place for us.

But the place prepared for us is not just a nicely decorated guest room in heaven. The place prepared for us is not a part of some escapist fantasy, a place where we’d escape the troubles of the world. No, the place prepared for us is the place prepared for Jesus. John’s gospel tells us of several places Jesus would go quite deliberately before he ever moved on up to the heavenly mansions. First, Jesus is meeting with his disciples in the upper room on Maundy Thursday, the place that had been prepared for them to celebrate the Passover, the feast of Unleavened Bread. It was a place that had been prepared for that special celebration of how God had saved His people before. Then, after supper, there would be the place that Judas knew, the Garden of Gethsemane, the place where Jesus would pray and prepare for what was to come, the place he would be betrayed and arrested.

Jesus would then go to the places prepared for him by our sin. He’d take his place before the

pride-filled leaders, Pilate and the Pharisees. Next came the place called Golgotha, the place of the skull, where he would take his place on the cross, receiving the punishment our sins deserve. From there he will go to his place in the ground, his tomb, the tomb prepared for Joseph of Arimathea, but given to Jesus.

That place, the tomb, is where we expect things to end. The tomb is not the end for Jesus. As he said just a few chapters earlier in John, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Jesus’ place in the tomb would bear much fruit, because of what it does for us, and for the world. His death defeated death for all who believe in him. His resurrection shows that we, too, will be raised. Jesus prepares a place for us.

Jesus goes ahead of us to prepare a place for us with him, on the cross. Because of that, because of the place prepared for us on the cross, we also have a place prepared for us in the empty tomb. Paul puts it this way when he writes to the Romans, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (Romans 6:6-8). Jesus prepared a place for us, so that we can live with him forever.

One controversial painting shows us what this looks like. Salvador Dali painted Christ of St. John of the Cross, completed in 1951. In it, one sees Jesus, hanging on the cross, over the world. The controversy is that Dali had changed the traditional perspective people have on the crucifixion. Rather than standing below the

cross, looking up into the face of Jesus, Dali asks the viewer, for a moment, to be situated above the cross, looking down upon Jesus, who himself is looking down upon the world. For one visitor who tried to damage the painting, this stance is sacrilegious. You place yourself above Jesus.

For others, however, this stance is divine. Some people see an artist inviting you, for a moment, to have God's view of the world. Our heavenly Father looks down upon the fallen world and he sees it through the eyes of his Son Jesus, dying on the cross, for all people.

Jesus asks us to see the world through him. Jesus hangs there, below us, offering his life for the world. And he invites us to see the world, through the cross, living in God's mission of love! Dali's painting offers us a visual reminder of this work of God. There, in the heights of heaven, is the cross. Jesus, in love, offering his life for the world. There below him is the world. It extends outward, across a lake, into the distance. This love of God is a love that will reach to the ends of the earth.

Because of all that Jesus did, he prepared a place for us with him forever. And that gives us hope. The hope comes not just from the place prepared by Jesus. The hope comes that Jesus has prepared it for you. He isn't just like a disinterested hotel clerk, preparing a room for whoever will come. He has prepared it for you, with the love of a new groom preparing to bring his bride home.

The hope also comes that it isn't just a place prepared for you by Jesus. It's a place prepared for you where you will be with Jesus. This passage is often read at funerals or the bedsides of the dying, when knowing God is there is

very comforting. In other times, it's a reminder that no matter how alone we are in this world, we have a place with Jesus. No matter what your family and friends think of you, no matter how much they hate you or dislike you because of your Christian faith, Jesus will always have a place for you.

Jesus is the one who goes to prepare a place for you in his Father's house. And if he goes and prepares a place for you, he will come again and take you to himself, that where he is, there you may be also. Through all the moves and changes, crosses and betrayals of life, we have a place prepared for us. What a wonderful promise.

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