

Fifth Sunday of Easter  
April 20, 2008

St. Mark Lutheran Church  
Rev. Alan Wolkenhauer

**John 14:1-14** *Jesus said to his disciples,* "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. (2) 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? (3) 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. (4) And you know the way to the place where I am going." (5) Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (6) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (7) If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." (8) Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." (9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (10) Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. (11) Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. (12) Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. (13) I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

## A Place for You

I'm so appreciative of our volunteers who prepared meals for our new members last weekend. Barb, Katie and Lisa arrived at 2:00 Saturday afternoon to prepare our New Member Welcome Dinner. As soon as that was over, they began setting up for the New Member breakfast; when I arrived bright and early Sunday morning, Barb and Katie, along with Jacob and Dizzy, were already starting to cook our morning meal. Their efforts, along with the support, prayers and love of the whole congregation, made our welcome of new members special and meaningful.

Preparing a welcoming time or place is always a labor of love. Whether you're getting ready for a banquet, anticipating the arrival of a new baby, or preparing your home for guests, there's a lot of work and care that go into making a place just right. There's not only the investment of time and money, but there's an emotional investment, as well. As you prepare a place for someone you love, you pour yourself into it. That's what makes it special. In today's gospel, Jesus promises that he goes to prepare a place for us. And you can be sure, that in his great love for you, Jesus has given everything to make that place wonderful, a place of everlasting joy in his presence.

This text is a popular reading at funerals, because it's filled with words of comfort and hope for those who must deal with grief and death: "Do not let your hearts be troubled...In my Father's house are many dwelling places...I go to prepare a place for you." Such words of Jesus are heard as wonderful promises for the end of this life -- and so they are. Jesus died and rose again for us. Then he ascended into heaven, so that he could prepare a place for us, an eternal home where we will be with him always. That hope sustains us; it gives us courage, strength and joy as we face the troubles of this life. We know that Jesus has lovingly prepared a place for us where sin, death, and sadness are no more. We

look forward to that heavenly home, and Jesus looks forward to meeting us there.

As our crew prepared the New Member Dinner, I could see the excitement in their faces as they got ready for the celebration. What a joy it is to prepare a place of beauty and love. What a sense of fulfillment when everything comes out just right after all the hard work. There must have been a sparkle in our Lord's eyes, too, when he promised to prepare a place for us. He had special plans for each one of his children as he prepared a place where we would feel loved and fulfilled. It must delight him to see us enter at last into the place that he has given so much to make ready.

But I don't think heaven is all that Jesus had in mind when he said that he would go to prepare a place for us. I believe that the place Jesus meant is a place specially created for each one of God's children through all of life. Jesus is saying that he'll go before you wherever you go to make things ready for you. He'll meet you as you journey through life, and in each circumstance, in every place, he'll be there to fill you with the special blessings he has prepared. Jesus loves you so dearly, that he has gone before you to prepare every place for you. He goes ahead of you and walks beside you, so that his loving presence can fill everything

you do. Your Lord is not satisfied just to prepare a banquet for you at your journey's end. He is your Way, your Truth, and your Life. He is with you every step of life's journey, so that where he is, you may be also.

Jesus makes that promise to our new members and to all who belong to St. Mark. He has prepared a place for you in this congregation where you can use your gifts in the midst of his people to reveal God's love to the world. In this Christian fellowship, he has prepared a community and a mission for you who are his own. Jesus makes that promise to those who are learning, those who are working, those who are seeking meaningful work, and those who are retired. He goes before you so that whatever your vocation, his love can be shared. Jesus makes that promise to all those who face an uncertain future because of sickness, grief, hardship and troubled relationships. He is going ahead of you to prepare a place, and his love will not fail you. And our Lord still makes that beautiful promise in the face of death -- we don't go into unknown, uncertain territory when we leave this life, because even when we die, Jesus has prepared a place for us. Throughout all of life and into eternity, Christ goes before us to meet us in love.

Jesus makes that same promise in another way later in this chapter when he says, "I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you."

That's a promise that no matter what life brings, we are never alone, because God, our heavenly Father, will never forsake or abandon us. It's been said: "It's not as important where you're going, as who you're going with." God will never leave us alone. The place he has prepared for us through life and in death, is a place where he is. We are not orphans, because God has filled us with his Holy Spirit and has called us his children. As we live in Jesus, we will know that each place is special and that every moment is a blessing, because it has been prepared for us in love by our risen Lord, who has given himself to us for all eternity. Amen.