

John 14:1-14

In my Father's house there are many mansions.

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A. The Gospel

I love the King James translation of this passage because I like to imagine all that space: mansions upon mansions, inside a simple small house, my father's house, like the ones I saw yesterday on Vine Street.

But first I know everyone does not have happy associations with their father's house and so let me invite you right now to adapt any passage you hear in this service into a language that DOES speaks to your heart. The Bible comes more alive when we all exercise our imaginations and find images for God that work for us. So adapt. Change the pronouns. Open up the text and find yourself in it. In my mother's kitchen. In my grandfather's garden. Where do you imagine all the space, all the love you need to be fully at home and fully alive and fully seen? What do you imagine?

B. Using your Imagination

I imagine a small wood framed house...like the ones I saw on Vine yesterday or maybe a very specific house, painted blue with white trim a homey comfortable place...not fancy at all with an old plaid sofa in the living room but when you go inside you discover there is more room here than you thought: rooms upon rooms. How could this be?

You go down the front hall and it turns out there is another kitchen and maybe a back porch and a second den and a library and maybe a school for children in the basement! And then, maybe you go upstairs and you go up a ladder to an attic and it's gigantic! And you open a wardrobe against the eaves and in the back behind all the mothballed coats way in the back, the back wall falls away and you find yourself in Narnia: a land of fauns and lions and white witches, cold as ice..**a fairy tale** world and yet... with the **help of our imagination**, it brings us just as close as we can possibly get to the profound truths of the Gospel! Rooms upon rooms upon rooms.

Or maybe you open a door to a kid's rooms and in there is what looks A British phone box...What?! It's DR Who's Tardis! The inside it is gigantic. It's a space ship that may carry you to the far end of the galaxy or maybe to the coronation of a King Charles and a Queen Camilla in Westminster Abbey which seems like another world entirely! In my father's house there are many mansions. There is room even for us! with all our baggage and heartache and trauma, just as we are as Brienne sang several weeks ago with the praise band.

COME AS YOU ARE. Such is the breadth of God, such is the generosity of God. Such is the base of our hope IN God. Rooms upon rooms upon rooms with space for each one of us to be ourselves.

C. But it isn't just in heaven

But it isn't just in heaven. If you notice, the first part of that sentence *In my father's house there are many dwelling places...* is in the present tense. This space of generosity and hope is available now. And I'd like to suggest even... right here. *Here is the church here is the steeple....open the doors and see all the...*

*This church too is our father's house: a house of many rooms and an expanding mission, a holy house with room for our dreams and for God's dream which we are trying to discern. A house of generosity and hope. There is already room here already for fine traditional worship for organ and brass and hymns (and even for an organ with some false notes on occasion!) and the hope for a choir again: room for sensing and altar bells; room for the BCP and Enriching Our Worship and for ever-expanding words for God; room for a praise band, and a saxophone player and trumpets; for a Victorian room spilling over with young children; for the past and the present and the future; for a dance company with a Christian mission, for Warming on Main; for NA groups for a basement we are hoping to renovate to provide space for community groups; for a refurbished youth room upstairs and maybe even a pilot after-school program. *We've even built a stage that reaches out into the world**

And...

Last night 90 people came into our sanctuary to hear Ameen Mokdad's story and hear his music. Two people from the Warming on Main group were included in that audience, as well and as members of First Church and South Church and the Church of the Epiphany in Durham and Grace and ST Peter's in Hartford, friends and strangers. We made connections with our surrounding community, as 6 string players and four dancers and a former prisoner of Isis *connected us to each other and to God through the power of the Holy Spirit in the sanctuary right here on a Saturday night.*

At one point, Ameen stepped forward and began singing his poetry *I will not be in war again* he sang and held out his arms *No more tears!*

He was passionate, almost angry. *No more pain. No pain!*
And above him our Jesus hung on the cross, showing us what we keep
doing to each other the world over. *Oh Father, they know not what they*
do and they keep doing it!

D. THE EUCHARIST

Which brings me to yet another space, a holy space, a space of great
mystery and humility and celebration, the space of the rite that brought
the church into being. The church didn't start with ecumenical counsels
or discussions about orthodoxy and heresy. It didn't even start with the
Bible. The church began with Jesus and a meal, a holy meal among
friends and God was present. That meal became the liturgy of the
Eucharist and today some 2,000 years later, we will once again come up
from our pews and go to this upper room, the altar, to experience the
presence of Jesus in the breaking of the bread

E. Eucharist: My experience

You may have noticed that I've been receiving the Eucharist too. It's
because I need it. And I can't receive it from myself, collar or not.

This is what happens to me: I put out my hands and a flat thin wafer is
placed in my palms. I will say this makes me think of our young friend
Gus who has a special feeling about these wafers. He doesn't like it
when it's real bread. These are the special ones...

I put the host in my mouth and swallow and by faith, it opens up inside
us like an accordion, offering me exactly what I most need

In my father's house there are: *mansions upon mansions* even in our bruised hearts there is always the possibility of more space. And we don't need to keep this miracle locked up in our building for safe keeping. We can reach out into the world and share it and the world is reaching back

Yesterday I spent the day learning about the Beman triangle: an African American settlement of 11 families in Middletown that grew up around the Cross Street Zion church some 200 years ago. The church moved 3 times and as one elderly gentleman pointed out to me. The first time was because wesleyan wanted more space so they moved us down hill, the way the water runs mind you to an area known then as DEAD SWAMP. Descendants from the church's first families had been invited back for the bicentennial celebration yesterday. As Mardi Loman, their church historian spoke of that history, she nodded to me. I looked behind me not knowing who she meant. *And i believe there is another church represented here today* she said generously *that is about to celebrate their long history. I wonder if they would like us to come celebrate with them*

I was so moved

OH YES please I cried out and flung my hands up in the air

!!! And they laughed and applauded. It was such a warm and inclusive welcome after such a long and difficult history. There is such hope and love in this city. Such possibility for new dreams and new confessions and conversations, new rooms to grow in. In *My father's house there are rooms and rooms and rooms* Even now even here

The house I imagined this morning as I read the Gospel was one of those small frame houses on Vine Street, maybe where the Beman family once lived. And I imagined if you went inside, there would be rooms and

rooms of stories from those African American families from 200 years ago: stories that we maybe do not yet know but we could learn: stories we can learn them together as we go forward; stories of suffering and resilience and perseverance and struggle that connect us; stories that oppressed people the world over know, stories like Ameen told us last night, stories that Jesus knows that many of us carry in our own hearts

Our pain and our hope and our resilience connect us to a God who has made room for all of us. *In my father's house there are many dwelling places.* Even now Even here

Thanks be to God