



6 Easter

5 May, 2002

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:7-18

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

In a Little While

Sermon given by Pastor David Stubbs

I recall the experience of leaving home for the first time. Some friends were to drive me to Houston. There I'd board a train for Nebraska, where I'd spend the year at Midland College. I handle "goodbyes" poorly. My bags were loaded into the car and I bounded off the porch and into the car. In tears, my mother stood on the porch, waving goodbye. It was then Mrs. Mills commanded me to return to my mother and say "goodbye" properly.

Each of us handles goodbyes a little differently. For some of us, saying goodbye is painful. We shed tears. There are periods of sadness, even depression may overcome us.

Others of us avoid the pain (like I tried to do that first time I left for college) by simply not saying "goodbye." We just walk away – trying to disappear. Some of us are very methodical about bringing a conclusion to relationships. Others try to maintain contact with friends and acquaintances in former places of residence.

It seems only days ago I left my 10 year home in Santa Fe, to return to Denver. Even though both Denver and Santa Fe have always felt like home to me, leaving the one down south was painful.

Life is a series of goodbyes, even if we never change our place of residence. Friends move away. Loved ones die. Relationships are broken. We change jobs or professions. As interests and experience expand, we give up former practices and relationships. Age refocuses our attention and redefines who we are and what we'll do.

We go away to school – children grow up and move away. Goodbyes – goodbyes – goodbyes.

Jesus said, *In a little while the world will no longer see me*"

That was surely difficult for his friends to hear. Painful! This one they'd grown to love – no longer around. And it would be difficult for us to hear, except we've read the Book and we know that this saying in John's Gospel is a *pre*-Easter saying and we've not only read the rest of the story, but we live in a *post*-Easter world.

In 1988, when I left the church I'd served for 14 years, I knew I could never return. Oh, perhaps sometime at an anniversary celebration (as this year). But I am no longer the pastor of that community. Many of those people I may never see again in this life. We make promises to write – or visit – or call. And in time but

Jesus said, *I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you you will see me; because I live and you also will live you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.*

Easter – John – both tell us God, in love, has pitched God's tent with us – God's presence is within us. We're not waiting the return of someone who has gone away somewhere into the unknown. The waters of

baptism have washed over us and confirmed that God has not only taken up residence within us, but made us part of God's very own Body. Each time we hear the Word – each time we eat this bread and drink this wine – God takes up residence in us anew and we become who we were initially made to be.

The first sentence of our reading today calls us to *keep God's commandments* and in John's writing, that commandment is made perfectly clear. Later in the discourse, John tells us that Jesus calls on us as members of the Body to love one another – and I might add – warts and all. It's in just this way that God resides in us and we reside in God, by heeding the call to love one another. Living a love that gets on its knees and washes feet. Love that touches wounds of people who have cancer, heart disease, leprosy, AIDS . . . Love that talks to lonely people who are Republicans, Democrats, Socialist, Evangelical/Fundamentalist, nerds, pretty/handsome, ugly, short, fat, tall, skinny, athletic, unable to identify which end of a bat to hold, smart, not so smart, shy, bold, people who have it *together*, people who spend their nights under bridges, people healthy of mind and body, people with bi-polar disorder . . . people who may be sitting right next to you this morning (or front or back).

Love that is willing to risk giving possessions and self away when it doesn't appear we can afford it. Love that cares about people who are hungry, or suffer injustice where they live in Denver, Adams County, Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan or South America. Love willing to speak out in their behalf and then do something about it. Love that says I'd even give up my job or life for you. WOW!

So that's what it means for God to be in us and we in God – for God to have taken up residence in us.

We no longer have to fear anything – especially the *goodbyes*. Because if we are one with God, then we are one with each other. I may never return to my friends in other cities in which I've lived, I may never again relate to sisters and brothers in a former parish, but because of God's indwelling and by being grafted on to the Body, I am with them and they with me. Just so, it's true with all the goodbyes in our lives.

Several years ago while camping in the woods, I spent time each morning in meditation. One morning, while meditating on the 84th Psalm, especially vv 1 & 3, I was moved to pen this prayer:

I love your palace . . .

My King and my God.

Limited to no place

and yet everywhere,

your glory is revealed.

The gold and crimson of the sunrise

on a mountainside –

the crisp morning air of autumn –

the smell of the forest.

I am awed by silence,

broken by the infrequent chatter of a hidden bird

and the rush of a nearby stream.

In the drops of water

vacating the roof after last night's rain . . .

I encounter you O God

in the warm golden glow of sun

as it streams through the branches of wet trees,

sparkling like a million precious jewels.

But most of all

I enjoy your presence

in the presence of my sisters and brothers

– in their laughter

– in their sharing and giving

– in their being and loving.

And last of all, I am humbled that you dwell in me,

unfit to be your home.

*Help me, O Lord, to know your presence and worship it
in the unity of the creation.*

I love your palace . . .

my King and my God.

Jesus said, *I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you . . . you will see me; because I live and you also will live . . . you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.*