



## ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

May 13, 2007

John 14:23-29

Vicar Elise Stringer

### "HOME"

*Home*...it's more than an address...it's more than a house...it's more than a place to store all our stuff.

For most of us *Home* is where we go when we need to be comforted. *Home* is where we feel we belong, where we feel safe and happy. *Home* is where things are familiar, where we are loved and accepted for who we are.

*Home* is where our family is! Whether that's a 2 story brick house with a 2 car garage and a picket fence, or a tent pitched in the mountains, with folding chairs and a campfire.

#### *Home is more than an address or a house.*

Jeffrey and I have been married now for 2 ½ years and have been living away from Columbia all that time. But every time we go to visit my parents, as soon as I walk through the door I smell that familiar smell of clean laundry and citrus, the smell that reminds me of my mom...the smell that surrounds me and feels like home.

For some of you the smell may be of cookies baking in the oven, or the smell of your mother's perfume or of fresh cut grass in the backyard. Home may be the feeling of holding your children in your arms or sitting on the couch with your spouse. Or maybe home is the picture of your family sharing a Sunday lunch around the dining room table.

#### *A home is more than a house or an address...*

In today's Gospel lesson from John, Jesus gives us a new meaning for the word *Home*.

***"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."***

In Jesus' words, *home* is God dwelling in us...God's promise to be with us always...God making His home with us.

Jesus explains this image of home to the disciples because at this point, He is preparing to ascend to the Father and will no longer be physically present with them. But He reminds them that there is no need to fear His leaving because He and the Father will make their home in whoever loves Him and keeps His word. Therefore they will never be alone.

#### *Home...it means we never have to be alone.*

As soon as I read this text I began to think of how much time and effort it takes to prepare my home for guests.

When someone is coming to our home to visit I like to be sure things are neat and clean. I scurry to put away the clutter and polish the furniture. I make sure there are enough clean towels and sheets for the guests and Jeffrey and I usually go to the grocery store to buy snacks. We've been known for having the best goodies around.

***We want our guests to feel welcome and comfortable in our home.***

But what about God...what do we do to welcome Him into our home? Jesus says that He and the Father will come to us and make their home with us? *Do we welcome them?*

Is there room in the house of our heart for God? And if there is room, how do we prepare for Him to come and make His home within us? *How do we prepare our house for the guest who wants to stay forever?*

*Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them."*

So we prepare our house to be God's home by loving Jesus and keeping His word.

But we read today that *Jesus is leaving*, our teacher, the one who has taught us how to live and how to love is leaving. How will we do this alone? How as God's children will we continue to keep His word and share His love, without our Lord and Savior? Without His word and guidance?

I imagine for the disciples there may have been feelings of abandonment, feelings of separation, of sadness and confusion at Jesus' leaving.

Sounds like what most of us experience at a funeral. We are truly glad that our loved one is no longer suffering the pains of this life. But we often wonder, what about us? We don't get our burden lifted; we only have more added to it. We are left lonely for the one who has gone away.

Although we have seen Jesus' empty tomb, and we have seen Him on the shore, awaiting our return from a long days work, we can no longer put our finger in His side or see the mark of the nails in His hands. Because we cannot reach out and touch Him, it may feel as though Jesus has left us alone to fend for ourselves in a world of uncertainty and fear. A world broken by anger, sickness and separation.

It may feel as though we are left to figure things out on our own...To travel the lonely roads of life by ourselves, To get our house in order without Him. *But Jesus tells us that we are not!*

*"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you."*

So we aren't alone. We don't have to figure things out on our own. *The Holy Spirit, our Advocate will be with us, walking alongside us, showing us the way. Helping us prepare our house for God.*

When I was about 7 years old I desperately wanted a new bicycle. A big girl bike I called it! So I begged my parents for one of those fancy bikes with the pink basket on the front and streamers on the handles. It had a banana seat and no training wheels.

I will never forget the day my mom and dad walked me out to our front steps and there stood this shiny new bike. Streamer, basket and all. I was so excited I couldn't wait to get on that bike and ride off. But there was one small problem. I had never ridden a bike without training wheels before. As soon as I got on that bike, I wobbled from side to side, realizing I wasn't quite ready for the big girl bike.

My parents and I spent the afternoon in the cul de sac in front of our house practicing. My parents would hold the back of the bike while I peddled slowly. Then finally late that day, I started to peddle a little faster and when I realized it I was down the street a ways. And when I looked back my parents were waving from a hundred yards away.

They had let go and I was riding all on my own! I have to admit I fell off a few times here and there but I always knew my parents would be there to help me right back up. Although I was riding by myself, I wasn't alone. My parents were right behind me.

This is what our Advocate, the Holy Spirit does for us. Reminds us that we are not alone, that someone greater than ourselves has hold of us, and will not let us go!

***Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."***

Do not fear, for we are not alone. We are not left broken and empty, scared and hurt. Today in this reading from the Gospel of John, we hear that in His leaving, Jesus has given us a gift...a gift of love and of peace...the Holy Spirit, our Advocate.

And the power of the Holy Spirit reminds us that we are loved and cared for. That we are connected to the Father and the Son always! That we are connected to one another, the body of Christ in this world.

The Holy Spirit walks beside us, behind us and around us, to teach us, to be with us, to help us back up when we fall down. To call us back when we try and find our own way.

It is the power of the Holy Spirit that transforms our lives. It is the Holy Spirit that we feel deep inside us, nudging us, opening our hearts and minds to God's calling. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that will lead and guide this congregation to continue in Christ's mission of love and service in the world. It is the Holy Spirit that will open our eyes to where God is leading us, to where God needs us to be. ***That is the gift of the Spirit. And what an amazing gift of grace it is!***

***"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."***

***A home is more than an address or a house.***

In Holy Baptism God promises to make a home with us...forever.  
I ask you...Is there room in the house of our heart for God? Is He welcome to make His home in us?

***Jesus tells us that He will live in our hearts through faith, if we will only let him.*** When we love Him and keep His word, He and the Father will make their home in us.

And through the waters of Baptism God has given us the Holy Spirit as our life-long advocate, calling us to deeper faith, and renewing our broken lives with an indescribable grace.

***And it's through this relationship that we prepare our hearts for God to dwell within us.***

This intimate union with God is possible because of the power of the Holy Spirit. The power by which we are strengthened and encouraged to love Christ by keeping His word, opening our hearts to be God's dwelling place.

The power by which we are strengthened and sent out in peace to proclaim God's unfailing message of love and forgiveness.

***God has chosen to make His home with us. His called and beloved children. God has chosen to be with us forever!*** Yes, He has chosen these earthly, fleshy bodies, these beautiful, broken, blessed and sick bodies to make His home in. And when we open our hearts to God amazing things happen.

But if we are honest, maybe today, at this very moment, we cannot usher God into a large and richly furnished room in our heart where He can dwell in peace and comfort, but maybe we can at least offer him a place to lay his head?

Who is dwelling in your home?

With love and support from this family of faith, let us open our hearts and invite the spirit to enter in. Let us prepare our house for God. For He and the Son are coming to make their home with us.

Thanks Be To God!