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## *God Making a Home with Us*

**A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith**  
**Easter 6 – Year C**

In today's Gospel Jesus said:

"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 (vs. 23).

Wow! At home with God. Now most of us know what it's like to make ourselves at home with our family growing up. There can be rough times, of course. But I have a fun example I'll share with you. Also, of course, we have made ourselves at home with some of our friends over the course of our lives. But I'll also get into that in a few minutes.

First, here's why I think we're talking about God making a home with us this Sunday. We're nearing the end of Easter season and getting ready for the transition to Pentecost season. So last Sunday we got a big hint about what that's going to mean. In the reading from the Book of Revelation, we read: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne." The speaker is John—John, the so-called 'Revelator'—as he declared:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
'See, the home of God is among mortals.  
God will dwell with them;  
they will be God's peoples,  
and God's own self will be with them' (Rev. 21:3; paraphrase mine).

There it is again: just like in today's gospel, Jesus promises that he and his Father will come to those who love him and 'make a home with them.' Imagine, what it's going to take for us to be ready to be at home with God! That's what we're getting ready for in this transition from Easter season to Pentecost season. That's why we're going to need the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That's why, already—in these readings even before Ascension Day this coming Thursday—already the readings are anticipating the Holy Spirit descending upon us, to take up God's habitation among us, to be in us, and with us; to make us fit for a universe where God is truly 'all and in all.'

In that connection, I heard of a family where a young girl comes up to her mother with great excitement and says:

'Mommy, mommy! In my Sunday school class the teacher said that human beings were created in God's image, and that we're like angels but with bodies. But when I told daddy what she said, he said that we come from monkeys and apes just like gorillas. Which one is right?'

And the mother answers:

'It's okay, dear. Your father was just describing his side of the family.'

Well, there you have it! I like it as an example of one of the best practices we're taught in conflict resolution: whenever possible, mediate conflicts and differences of opinion with wit and humor. Of course I'm not suggesting we divide our

families into two groups—those related to angels vs. those descended from apes. Instead, you get it that I'm commending to us all the best practice of figuring out lighthearted or skillful responses to challenging questions, issues and conflicts.

Now, in that connection, I'm also reminded of my mentor in conflict resolution on a larger scale. Here I'm going from the scale of the family, to the scale of race relations in our country, and in the world. At that larger scale, I was fortunate to be coached by a skilled and great-hearted Jewish woman. Ricky Sherover-Marcuse (1938-1988) is now deceased. But back in the 1980s she was a major diversity trainer in the San Francisco Bay Area. More pertinent here today, our friendship gives me an excellent opportunity to offer an example of what it means to make oneself at home beyond one's own family. Thank God, we human beings are capable of making ourselves at home with friends who are so different from the classical definition of friendship: 'Friends share things in common.'

Ricky Sherover described herself as a Jewish Marxist feminist atheist. I, on the other hand, was an African American Christian theology student. But across all those differences we befriended each other. She invited me to make myself at home in her world, and I, from my black Baptist origins, invited her to be at home in my world.

I remember with fondness her joking about all that. With typical Jewish wit and humor she used to say,

'Thee, my people would say, looking at the two of us together: Doesn't he have enough problems as a Black man without adding to his troubles by taking up with a Jew!'

Oh well: You can well believe that I was honored then, and continue to be honored, by our unlikely friendship! Indeed, church family and friends of Christ, as we invite one another to be at home in this congregation, I share with you what I shared with her. Here's the diversity principle I learned at the scale of our community here today, when I came to her and said, in effect, "Teacher, teacher; tell me . . ."

How do you do it? How can you, as a Jew, embrace racists and anti-Semites so generously and with such a big heart in your workshops and trainings?

And Ricky said to me:

Thee, that's not who they really are. Underneath their hate and fear are people who grew up as children who never asked to be socialized into that. So don't you do the same to them: Don't you fail to see the real human beings underneath their social conditioning. Rather join me in finding ways to give some resources to find a way out, rather than just calling them on it and leaving them stuck in it.

Now, ever since hearing that exhortation from my mentor, I have endeavored to follow her good coaching and so to honor our friendship. And as regards our gospel good news here today, I have endeavored to find ways to make a home in heaven and on earth for all of us—family and strangers, friends and foes, the righteous and the unrighteous alike.

That's the spirit of our faith and testimony: that's the way we're being prepared to become a people among whom God will make a home among us.

Because Jesus said, "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.

And 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."

And so, church family: Be at peace. Not as the world gives peace; rather, be at peace in the way that Jesus promised cannot be taken away.

As Jesus said:

"You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.

Rejoice therefore, because greater things are in store for us. Rejoice as we anticipate the Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit, because the spirit that is in us is greater than anything contrary that is in the world.

And so we reaffirm our opening prayer (Collect) for today:

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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