

In memory of Joe Love  
July 11, 2009  
John 14: 1-6

This morning we are gathered in celebration of the life of Joe Love. Welcome. Joe was at home in this place, and other places, because Joe was at home with all you folks who have come here from all over.

When I think of Joe I think of the phrase, " master builder." Joe was a master builder. Over the years, he perfected his craft. His craft was to assemble good folks who could build things. With them, Joe built houses, but Joe built more than that. Joe built homes . One person can't build a house alone. It takes a crew of folks who can work together. Joe did that, he brought people together. He prepared places for people. In building homes, Joe built up people too, because Joe Love loved people. It wasn't just about the houses, it was about building dwelling places with and for folks who quickly became friends with Joe in the process. As friends gathered here today, we miss Joe. Especially Geoff and Taylor and Pam will miss Joe Love. They dwelt in the house that Love built. We all will miss Joe's wry sense of humor, the twinkle in his eye that told you laughter was soon to follow. Even in his last week of life, Joe's dry wit was front and center, even as Joe helped plan this service in celebration of his life. We will all miss our friend, Joe Love.

One can't help but wonder, when a friend dies. Where did he go? Is he with God? Is he in heaven? What is heaven? What if he's gone for good? Will we see him again? In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus is offering words of comfort to his disciples who fear that they will lose their friend Jesus when he dies. Remember that the twelve who were with Jesus in his last hours were extremely troubled, they were heartbroken, they were afraid and they grieved because they feared their hopes and dreams were somehow going to die with Jesus. He says to them:

“Don't let your hearts be troubled...you trust God...trust me too. There is room for you where I am going and I won't abandon you...I will come and get you so you can be where I am...when death comes and it seems as though I am gone... don't be afraid... I am going to prepare a place for you.

This is a specific statement....Jesus points us toward hope *beyond* death...he promises that there is a place with him beyond this life and it is clear that the way to this life is through a simple trust that Jesus leads the way toward life eternal with God.

I've got some good news for you this morning. Jesus' promise of Life after death is not contingent on your intellectual ability. If you believe you can go it alone, you're wrong. And as wonderful as Joe was in this life, his Life after death is not based on his being such a tremendously good person that God simply can't resist opening the pearly gates to welcome Joe in . None of us earn our way in. We aren't promised eternal life because we have joined the right religion club or have memorized the right doctrine of faith...we always make things way too complicated. It's not complicated. It's simple.

Our assurance of life after death is a simple promise that Jesus Christ makes to each of us. It is a promise made to all who trust that God will not abandon us in the shadows of death...it's not easy to say goodbye. Even as he prepares for his own death, Jesus tells his beloved friends. "I go to prepare a place for you. *I will come back*. I will take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am." that's what Jesus promises us. Jesus, the Master Builder.

The good news for today is this, Jesus is showing us how to say good-bye (at least for now). Not all of us want to say good-bye. Thomas didn't. "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." It is a simple reassurance. We have a home prepared for us. There's no need to worry about where this home is built, our true home exists beyond place and time. Our home is with God. We don't have to know the way, Jesus will take us there.

Today, we say good-bye to Joe and we pray that he may take his rest and be at home with all the faithful departed and our Lord Jesus in God's dwelling place. Listen to the music today. Joe especially loved the music chosen for this day and its profoundly hopeful message. Joe especially wanted these two choirs to assemble here today side by side, two choirs of good souls with whom he dearly loved singing. Today we all sing out with Pam and Geoff and Taylor in celebration of Joe's good life on this earth and we celebrate a dwelling place with God which is prepared for us all.