

Rev. David R. Solum
5th Sunday of Easter
May 9 & 10, 2020
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City
John 14:1-14

When a young person leaves home for the first time and either takes a job or goes to college someplace far away, it is easy to get homesick. You miss the comfort of familiarity, the support and enjoyment of your community of friends and family, and the safety and warmth of the love of your parents. At home everything is safer and surer. You know everything's going to be okay. Out in the world, everything relies on you... and you are vulnerable; you have weaknesses; and there are many temptations. But when you return home, you feel at peace. It's like you never left.

Home is not necessarily the building in which you reside, although you might have some sentimental attachment to it. Many of you are probably feeling stir crazy right now in your houses. Houses can also be miserable, depending on who lives in them. Houses also cost a lot of money and need a lot of work. Home – to use the cliché – is really where the heart is.

During the shutdown we Christians have longed for this house, and many still long for this house who are unable to be with us yet. Why? Because, despite what most people in our country think, we know that what we have here is more than just a social gathering or an essential business. And it's not the building itself, although this sanctuary is beautiful and points us to Christ and the kingdom of heaven. This is home because our family meets here. Into the Triune family – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – we are reborn and made God's children and brothers and sisters in Christ. Here Christ comes down into our midst and gives us His Holy Spirit. Here we

are disciplined, strengthened, and nurtured to eternal life by our God. We are fed with heavenly food. And in this communion, we sing and celebrate the salvation God has won in Jesus Christ, and we admonish and encourage each other along the way, so that no one would fail to reach our eternal home.

We long for this place because out in the world it's all about death tolls, the virus, the economy, protests, politics, shutdowns and opening up, and holding on to this world for dear life.

Everyone is terrified that one little mistake and they could die or perhaps kill someone. In fear for their lives they're constantly looking over their shoulder in the stores and markets, judging each other whether they are being safe or not. Or they're sitting all day watching the news tell them about their destroyed future. The institutions we relied on and life as we know it has been shown to be incredibly vulnerable. In short, the world is dying. But you already knew that, didn't you? We Christians have known all along, and Christ has promised that this world will pass away. He will return and everything will be burned with fire and we will be given an eternal kingdom. But for those who don't hope in Christ, they are holding on for dear life to a sinking ship. Hence all the terror, rage, and despair you see out there. They are losing their only hope.

But Christ says to us, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. I have gone and prepared a place for you." Though all earthly homes be destroyed, your home with Christ remains. Christ purchased that home with His own precious blood. He has willed it to you and you receive it now by faith, and when He comes again, you will receive it in full glory.

We have been marked safe by Christ's holy cross in baptism. Within this faith we can have peace amidst the changes and chances of life, knowing that we are reconciled to the Lord over all pandemics and affairs of this world. We have God's grace and favor with us, so that, no matter what we suffer, we will nevertheless be saved from it and live forever. Contrary to what the world believes, our lives do not depend on closed or open businesses, on the economy, or on social distancing, or masks. All life depends on God, who gives it and take it away according to His will. You can run as fast as you can away from coronavirus and, if it is your time, you'll die of something else. We take certain precautions and follow health guidelines for other reasons. We don't want to test God by living carelessly; we want to honor and protect the body God has given us and others; and we want to show others God's love by the way protect people's bodily health. But we don't do it because we are in control of our lives and can somehow escape death or lengthen our days. That is entrusted to God. Thank God. Because if it were up to us, we would all die and fail to receive what God has promised.

Worshipping this way with social distancing, masks and such, probably feels uncomfortable to you. It certainly does to me. It definitely feels a little less like home here. But, remember, this isn't our final home. We have gathered here at Immanuel because it gives us a taste of our true home and leads us to that home. The joy, the family, the fellowship, the food, the worship, will only be magnified and perfected in heaven. Even here, in this blessed place, we are longing to be home. We can't wait to be without sorrow or pain or weakness. We can't wait to be socially close to one another and embrace each other, and not only the saints here gathered but all the saints who have gone before us. Our faces will no more be masked; they will shine like the sun.

We will need no sanitizing because we will be completely clean. And all the burdens of this life will be lifted.

And in the Sacrament, we are given a glimpse of this home. We join with angels and archangels and the company of heaven who have already won their crown of victory, singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.” And we feast on the very body and blood of our Lord and toast to our victory over pandemics and sin and death. We are covered with Christ’s righteousness and sanctified, so that we are presented to God without any stain of sin. We are strengthened in love and peace and joy for our service to others. Through Christ’s gifts we are brought a little nearer to heaven, so that once we reach that blessed place, it won’t be like going someplace foreign or strange or uncomfortable, it’ll be like going home.

Amen.