

In our text, Jesus is making some travel plans, and he's sharing these plans with his disciples. Jesus wants to take the terror out of travel, and thus his opening words recorded in chapter 14 are, "Let not your heart be troubled" (KJV). Jesus is saying, "Look, folks, I'm going away. Here's what you need to know, because someday you will be taking this trip, too." And then Jesus talks about the trip, sort of like the tour leader who has arranged everything, and who is going on ahead to ensure that everything is up to snuff before the group arrives.

**The destination.** Where are we going? Jesus answers this question in three ways. First, he says that he (and later, his disciples) is going to "my Father's house" (v. 2). Second, he identifies a location within "my Father's house" as a "dwelling-place." In other words, where he is going, and where the disciples are someday going, is a place where one lives. The destination is a place to live. The third description is the most bland and nondescript: the destination is simply called a "place" (vv. 2, 3, 4).

Clearly, the expression "my Father's house" is a metaphor. It's not like there's a physical structure in heaven that has rooms with our names on them. I'm not asking you to believe there are castles in the air. Yet, the implication is clear: The place where Jesus is going is a place to live and reside. He is going to his Father's house. In other words, he is going home. And this is why the disciples should feel comforted. Jesus is going home, and someday, the disciples - and all of us - will likewise be going to the "Father's house." We, too, will be, in a real sense, going home.

But there's another nuance at work here as we try to answer the question, "Where are we going?" Ultimately, our destination is God. Look at verse 6b: "No one comes to the Father except through me." When we talk about our future destination, it comes down to this reality: We are going to God. We are going to live and dwell and have our eternal being in the presence of God. This is why we should not be troubled. We believe in God and we believe in Jesus (v. 1).

**The travel agent.** Who is making arrangements? Jesus. Jesus is in the details. Jesus has it covered. If you're taking an extended trip, visiting several countries, you need someone to take care of everything. You have rooms to book, rental cars to arrange, flights to schedule, meals to organize, sights to see, and museum fees to pay. Someone has to do all of this. A good tour guide or travel agent is essential.

Perhaps you have handled these details in the past. For this trip, however, Jesus is handling the details. You believe in God, he says. "Believe also in me" (v. 1). He reminds us that he's been communicating with us all along: "If it were not so, I would have told you..." (v. 2). He describes his role as someone going ahead to make preparations (vv. 2-3).

When it comes to their eternal destination, the disciples must trust in Jesus. They must believe that Jesus is the advance man who will make sure everything is ready. We may have a ton of questions about this journey, it may be scary in some ways, but not to worry: the travel plans are being handled by Jesus himself.

**The accommodations.** What are the rooms like? Jesus describes them as being "prepared" (v. 2.) At the fancy places - the five-star hotels - you're going to get a basket of fruit, perhaps a handwritten note from the GM, a mint on the pillow, turn-down service, laundry service, coffee maker, free Wi-Fi, a desk, comfortable chairs, king-size bed, subdued lighting, heated toilet seats and scented oils. But, if you're stopping at the No-Name Motel somewhere along the Interstate, the rooms might not be *quite* as prepared. You may need a six-pack of paper towels and a bottle of Lysol before you'll even consider staying in the room.

Jesus says our eternal accommodations will be "prepared." Of course, we're still speaking metaphorically here, but this "prepared" dwelling-place is going to be awesome! It's not only going to meet expectations, it's going to exceed expectations, be beyond our wildest imaginations. No need for our hearts to be "troubled" about the accommodations.

**Directions.** How do we get there? Jesus says that the disciples "know the way to the place where I am going" (v. 4). But Thomas, speaking for the disciples, says that they don't even know the destination, so how can they know the way? (v. 5). Clearly, someone has not been paying attention. Jesus' answer is classic, and one of the most well-known of all the gospel texts: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (v. 6).

Jesus is the way. Jesus is all the direction we need and our journey to our eternal destination is already under way. Even today, as we struggle to love someone who makes it very difficult to love, as we struggle to lift up the needy or provide comfort to the sorrowing, we may not know how to get to where we're supposed to go. But Jesus is our

Guide, our Model, our Template. He is our sense of direction. Jesus is the blue dot on our GPS screen that shows us where we are. No need to be troubled about the way.

**The welcome party.** Who's going to meet us when we get there? Saint Peter? Jesus himself? In truth, we don't know who will be the first to greet us. But, I think the parable of the prodigal son may give us a clue. Recall that when the prodigal son runs out of cash and is jobless and homeless, he doesn't say, "I should go back to my house," or "I should go back to my boyhood home." He says, "I will get up and go to my father" (Luke 15:18).

Who's going to meet us? God, of course. Back to the parable: "So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him" (v. 20). If the father of this story runs to meet his long-lost child, how much more will our Heavenly Parent be there to greet us as we reach our eternal destination? And then, the real celebration will begin!

We should not lose sight of the fact that none of this is possible unless Jesus goes away. This is what Jesus is trying to explain to his disciples. Jesus is going to God's house, but he is going by way of the cross. Because of the cross, we are guaranteed a room. Because of the cross, we will one day be welcomed into the kingdom. Because of the cross, we can know Christ, who is the way to eternal life. So, no need for troubled hearts. No need to worry about travel plans. Jesus has it covered.

Prayer: God, You are the source of our life. You have given us a wonderful world and permeated it through and through with your grace and your love. You have promised that you will give us your Spirit, to be with us as we journey through this life. Yet, we confess the many times when our eyes can't see you, can't take you in, can't comprehend how you can be at work in pain and disappointment and sorrow. We need your Spirit to lift our sights to your wide horizons. Teach us to pray with such openness to your Spirit that you make yourself plain to us. Bring us to that place where we are willing to place our lives in your keeping, to submit to your life-changing love, and to move with you into your large open spaces of salvation. We ask these things in Jesus' name, our light and our salvation, who lives and reigns with the You and the Spirit, forever and ever. Amen

**Sources:**

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- Hewitt, Ed. "A peek at peak travel." independenttraveler.com. Retrieved November 7, 2016.

## Travel Plans

**Sunday, May 14, 2017**

**The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN**

**John 14:1-14**

Last year, Timothy Merrill, senior editor of *Homiletics*, was in Shanghai, China, on a red-eye flight en-route to Delhi, India. Boarding began about 20 minutes late, but by 9 p.m. he was in his window seat. But the Boeing 777 did not leave the gate in Shanghai until 3 a.m. - six hours later! Then, there was still a seven-hour flight ahead of him. This, he said later, was the definition of "grueling." In the United States, keeping passengers in a plane more than three hours on a domestic flight (four hours on an international flight) is illegal. But in other parts of the world, well, things are different.

I'm sure you have your own travel horror story. Perhaps you've gotten stuck in the middle seat between two 300-pound linebackers. Perhaps you've been seated next to someone who hadn't showered in a while. Perhaps you've had someone hurl their breakfast on you. Perhaps you sat in front of a parent with 8-month-old triplets. Perhaps it was a weather delay at O'Hare. (By the way, all of those things happened to me on flights!)

We're approaching the summer peak travel season. Print and online news sources, including the daily papers, will no doubt feature tips about how to take the terror out of travel. The discussion is no longer about how to make travel a fun and enjoyable experience. Those days are gone. What we want to do is figure out how to mitigate the unpleasantness.

Travel is tough. Before going anywhere you have to do your homework. First, you have to know where you're going. Maybe you'll contact a travel agent to help with the details. You'll need a place to stay and directions on how to get there. Finally, you'll want to know what to expect when you get there.