

***In the Father's House – John 14:1-14***

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**May 3, 2026**

Jesus begins this passage with the instruction, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” What does it mean for hearts to be troubled? We tend to interpret this as a troubling of emotions, meaning “Do not let your hearts be disturbed.” It is interesting that Jesus himself is described as troubled three times in John (in chapters 11, 12, and 13). What sense does it make for him to command his friends, not once but twice (later in chapter 14) to not let their hearts be troubled, when he has been troubled repeatedly?

He’s not calling them to not have troubled hearts about, in this case, his own impending absence. No, he calls his followers to trust him even when events happen (death, loss) that threaten the trust they have in him.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

I lost a friend this past week. His name was Chris, and he died unexpectedly last weekend. Chris was in his sixties and single all his life. He had numerous challenges throughout his life. He was a member of the church family I served in Nebraska (as were his parents before their deaths) and we became friends there and continued that friendship at a distance over the last twelve years.

Many of our conversations over the years were centered on what was behind Chris’ troubled heart. He grew up in and was shaped rather profoundly by a faith tradition that used threats to build and safeguard the church. Chris always, even long after he left that tradition, felt he was threatened to act a certain way and

practice discipleship in a certain way so that he would avoid punishment from the God who made him. He practiced his faith, therefore, in fear.

Time and time again, his fears over the punishment he was certain awaited him (which threatened his trust in Jesus) were overwhelming—long after he left that church. And time and again, I tried to calm his troubled heart by insisting that a gracious and merciful God who made him and loved him would not make eternal punishment the final verdict.

Today, in the wake of his death, our hope and our faith in this God of mercy and new life informs us that Chris' heart is forever at rest in the joy of his eternal home, where he has been reunited with mother and father as he so longed he would be in his final earthly years.

Chris' final resting place in the everlasting arms of a loving God awaits those who believe in God, Jesus says in verse 1.

Jesus says to this group of disciples that they, collectively, should not have their hearts be troubled. For when they are no longer together, it is much more likely for hearts to become troubled.

In verse 2, Jesus describes a place, "my Father's house" he calls is, that has room for everyone and which Jesus is going ahead to prepare. When Jesus says there are many "dwelling places," this has less to do with heavenly mansions and more to do with the relationship between him and his followers. The point is that, where he was, there they would be also. Jesus is promising that both here and hereafter, he and his followers will be together.

And isn't it indeed true that when we are together with each other, and when Jesus therefore abides with us, our hearts tend to be less troubled.

In the last years of his life, my friend Chris struggled to maintain a sense of community with others who share his faith. When his mother died, his connection to the Presbyterian family of faith that we were all part of weakened. And making it more difficult was that toward the end of his life he didn't have transportation to help him physically stay connected to that community.

I spoke quite a bit about this last Sunday: a community of faith strengthens our hearts and allows our faith to grow and mature.

When Jesus coins the phrase "my Father's house," he wasn't talking about a physical structure. He was more concerned for any space, material or spiritual, where he and his disciples could be together.

Yet, it's hard to avoid thinking about how physical spaces, like a house, like a church, can enhance the relationships we have between our brothers and sisters in faith and the God who unites us, and how they can help our hearts to be less troubled.

As a faith community here, we're blessed to have a venue for fellowship, for study, for personal interaction and support, and most importantly, for worship. For when the community of faith gathers in "the Father's house," we don't merely gather. Instead, we gather in God's name.

In verse 8, when Philip says to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied," he's seeking a greater revelation of the Holy. Despite all the moments he and the other disciples had together with Jesus—the miracles, the teaching—Philip can't get enough of the Holy, of the abundance Jesus brings.

We find that reassurance of Jesus' abundant life and our never being alone in numerous places, none lesser for most of us than a house of worship like this.

One of the many ways to describe a worship space is not only God's house, but also a signpost of hope. And for twenty-six years, this space has been that to this community in the heart of this neighborhood.

So often we hear "the church is the people, not the building." And while that's technically true (the church is the redeemed people of God), the statement comes within a broader theology — sometimes stated, sometimes implied — that treats the material realm as secondary and focuses instead on souls. It's a perspective that sees bodies, buildings, and even creation as insignificant in light of the spiritual realm.

In Scripture, though, it's clear that God cares about the whole creation: not just souls but bodies, not just heaven but earth. Yes, the church is the people of God. But we're an embodied people who inhabit space and are called to represent God's reign wherever we go — places that echo the beauty, peace, and holiness of the kingdom, where heaven and earth meet and where God's presence is made known.

If God cares about people and place, then church buildings matter. They aren't just useful spaces for gathering; they're outposts of God's kingdom, signposts of hope. More than mere brick and mortar, church buildings can be sacred spaces set apart for God's purposes. No matter what's going on in the surrounding areas, Christians can say, "This space isn't just a building — it's a foretaste of the kingdom, where love reigns, dignity is restored, the weary are embraced, and grace overflows."

Whatever forms churches possess—stained glass, expansive ceilings, white walls, a high pulpit, or the congregation in the round—physical spaces help shape us into the worshippers God would have us be.

And this house of God has been the venue where Presbyterians in Farragut live into their calling as worshippers—in this tradition, within our theology—for more than a quarter century.

The Fresh Look 2 Campaign is designed to enhance what is already a beautiful, dignified, open, and inviting space. By giving our narthex a fresh look, by improving technology here in the sanctuary (including light and sound), and by revamping the front of the sanctuary (the chancel we call it) to make it more functional for both worship leaders and worshipers, we can make our worship of God and our being together even more meaningful.

As you make your commitments this morning at the end of the service, do so knowing that you're making this signpost of hope that is our building stronger for decades to come.

Jeremy Treat, a pastor of a church in Los Angeles that had its beginnings in a rented school and now owns two inherited buildings, said, "I've come to see that a church building is more than a convenience—it's a tool for mission, a sign of stability, and a witness to the gospel in the heart of a city.

"Yes, the church is the people, but we're an embodied people who inhabit real places. In a city like Los Angeles—where everything feels transient and disjointed—having a permanent presence is a powerful declaration that God's kingdom is here, now, and among us. A church building isn't just a structure; it's a signpost of hope, a reminder that God is making all things new.

And as we steward these spaces with care, beauty, and purpose, we participate in God's mission, making earth feel more like heaven as God's presence is on full display."

"Making earth feel more like heaven as God's presence is on full display."

That's what a church building like ours can do; it's where hearts can become less troubled. And it's where we can meet and worship the one who truly is "the way and the truth and the life."