

God's Big House **John 14:1-14**

Do you watch HGTV? Nancy and I have been hooked on that show for at least the last 10 years! There has been a trend that is sweeping the nation. Or at least HGTV wants you to believe it is sweeping the nation. This is the so-called tiny house movement. People are abandoning traditional housing — the three-bedroom, two-bathroom mansions that many of us live in — and moving to tiny homes. These can be as small as 400 square feet. And they're portable, so if you want to live in Florida for a while, you can, and if you decide you want to live in Maine instead, you can just hitch up your house and head north! The most fascinating part of the shows on HGTV that feature homebuyers shopping tiny is watching how they try to maximize that little amount of space. There are beds that fold up into the wall, bookshelves that are built into the steps and televisions that slide into the floor, allowing the tabletop to fold down so you can eat dinner. There are some clever people working on these tiny houses, and they are making a fortune.

Today's reading from John's gospel portrays something that is the opposite of a tiny house. In the New Revised Standard Version, verse 2 says, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places." The Common English Bible words it, "My Father's house has room to spare," which is even clearer. There's nothing tiny about God's house! There is room for everyone!

Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them. This work was done the very next day after Jesus spoke these words. He prepared a place for them, and for you and me, through his self-offering on the cross. This opened the door, as it were, to God's "Big House." And now everyone is invited to go in.

One of the selling points of many tiny houses, as mentioned, is that they are portable. You can take your house anywhere you want to live. All you need is a clear spot, and you can plant yourself there. If anyone were to ask the way to your tiny house, it could very well depend on where you have parked it today.

In verse 6, Jesus describes God's Big House as only having one address. He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." There is only one way to get there. It is Jesus.

Right away, this may seem like a limitation. Didn't Jesus say there were many dwelling places? And now he's saying that he is the only way to the Father? With billions of people in the world, and only a part of them Christian, it would be tempting to think that the Father's house, though not tiny, might be smaller than we previously thought.

If that's where we are, perhaps our understanding of God's house needs to flip! House-flipping shows are often melded with the home-improvement genre and show people buying a house as cheaply as possible, fixing it up and then selling

it for as much as possible. One of these shows, called *First-Time Flippers* features amateurs in the real estate and construction worlds attempting to pull off one of these projects.

Sometimes things go so badly that they have to try to sell the house “as is,” meaning that no matter how messed up they’ve made the house, they try to get whatever they can for it and get out quickly.

When it comes to understanding the concept of God’s house, with many dwelling places, we might feel like first-time flippers. It’s easy to feel like an amateur when thinking about the things of God, especially when we realize that, thanks to the Great Commission that Jesus gave to the church to make disciples of all nations, it is our job to issue the invitations to the Big House.

We might feel unqualified for the task at hand. The disciples, in that upper room with Jesus, having spent three years following him around, were still befuddled. Philip illustrates this by saying, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” This earns a question from Jesus: “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?” If Philip does not, Jesus continues, he can believe the works that Jesus has done.

This makes sense, right? Jesus has done some amazing things. The list of “signs” that Jesus performs in John’s gospel includes changing water into wine, healing several folks, feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, walking on water, giving a blind man sight and the *coup de gras*, raising

Lazarus from the dead. Jesus' instructions to believe these signs as proof that he is in the Father and the Father is in him make sense.

What may not make sense to us, however, is what Jesus says in the very next statement: "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." I don't know about you, but this feels like Chip or JoAnna Gaines or any of those big-time TV contractors telling a guy like me, who owns only a few tools, that I am going to build even greater houses than they! It defies our common sense. And it would be nonsensical, but for the fact that none of what Jesus is describing relies on our own abilities or power. The verse that follows this has Jesus saying, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

So, when Jesus says that we will do greater works than the ones he did, he didn't mean we'd do them on our own. His position at the right hand of God is a power position, and when we ask for anything in Jesus' name, then absolutely *anything* becomes possible. When my father and mother and brother were dying and especially when my son Aaron was dying, I prayed so hard that God would heal them so that they could live longer here on this earth because God said if you ask for anything in my name I will grant it. And I know all of you have done the same thing.

And I know that God was saying all those times, “Dave, Dave, Dave, why are you being so selfish – don’t you know the best thing for your loved ones is the abundant life I’ve been preparing for them is the best thing for them. Don’t you want them in my BIG BEAUTIFUL HOUSE?”

There is a great deal of encouragement in our Gospel Reading for today! We know that we have a place in God’s Big House. The fad these days is to build smaller and smaller houses, but God’s house has room to spare. And though we know that it is not up to us to decide who gets to enter the house, we can play a role in issuing invitations. And if we feel completely unqualified for this task, we know that the Master Builder is behind us, and the gifts and abilities we have to do the job are actually from God.

So, we should hear Jesus’ words with humility. We can be grateful that we know him and that our place in the Father’s house has been prepared, and we can be energized for action so that others may claim their place as well. God, in some mysterious way, will bring all those who are meant to be in the house to the doorstep. We just need to make sure that we’re not missing the opportunity to invite people there.

And finally, this: God’s Big House is meant to be explored. Martin Luther talked about the spiritual journey as a house. We enter the door the moment we accept God’s offer of salvation. We then have the rest of our lives to explore the house, as we grow closer to God through sanctifying grace.

In God's house, there are many dwelling places. There is room to spare. We are invited, through the help of God's grace, to expand our own spiritual house, and to expand our concept of who can enter God's. In this case, less is not more, and bigger really is better! Unlike in many of the home-improvement shows, however, we do not need to do the work ourselves. It's not *First-Time Flip*. It's more like that old show, *Yard Crashers*, where people just show up and start making yard improvements — except it's God who shows up! All we have to do is open the door and let the work begin.

This takes humility, but it also inspires gratitude. This humility and gratitude do not lead us to be judgmental with others, but to be enthusiastic in spreading the good news. If *Yard Crashers*, or something like that, came and repaired your home, you wouldn't then look down on someone with a not-so-nice house as if you had fixed yours all by yourself. You would tell the story about how your place was a mess until someone showed up and helped you.

That's what the invitation to discipleship sounds like. It's stepping aside and holding the door open, trusting that, just as there was room for you, there is room for everyone. Indeed, there is room to spare in the Father's Big House!

What is behind God's invitation to discipleship? It's all about relationship. God can't stand being without us for one second. Can you imagine what it feels like to be connected to God — not so much because you want to be near God — but because God wants to be near you! Think about it! Amen!