

“Make Yourself at Home!”

John 14:1-3, 20-21, 23; Acts 16:9-15 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – May 25, 2025

Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might welcome you into our hearts and our lives with joy and humble compassion. In Jesus' name, Amen.

What does it mean to you to “feel at home”? If someone told you to “make yourself at home,” what would you assume they’re saying? Take a moment and think about that, maybe come up with some examples or specific signs that would help you to know you are home. Even if home has not been the way it should have been for you, we can hopefully imagine an ideal “home” as a place where we can relax, where we know we won’t be judged for our mistakes, where we are comfortable, surrounded by our favorite things and people and pets, a place where we are understood or at least loved unconditionally despite being mysterious.

It’s interesting to me how central this concept is to the way we think about Christian faith and the church, especially when you remember that Jesus didn’t really have a home. Perhaps it was his nomadic career that made him so aware of the importance of being welcomed as if you are home. When we say we want people to feel God’s love, we frequently talk about it as welcoming someone home. This is a place where you belong, we say; there is a place at the table just for you.

You heard the choir sing it this morning, before we read about it from John's gospel: "In my Father's house there are many rooms; I go to prepare a place for you." There is joy and light and "welcome in this place." We sing about this idea a lot, actually. At the end of Hymn #80, a musical version of the 23rd Psalm: "... no more a stranger nor a guest, but like a child at home." "Going home, going home, I'm just going home." "...to a home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away."

It makes you feel warm inside, doesn't it? This is such an important experience, feeling like you belong in the home of God. And the song is right: we aren't welcomed into God's house as strangers, or even as guests; we're welcomed in as people who belong here, as if this is where we began and we're just returning. At some level, this "home" metaphor speaks to what it means to be loved more deeply than we can imagine by One who knows us better than we know ourselves. So many of our relationships are careful, guarded, because we're afraid that if people knew more about us – our fears, our weaknesses, our weird habits – they might not like us anymore. Being "welcomed home" represents being loved by those who have witnessed our lives from the very beginning, and therefore know more about us than most people and love us anyway.

Some of us were blessed with homes that modeled this accepting love. For others, our actual homes did not give us this experience of unconditional love. That's why it's even more important that we make it manifest here in our church family.

Even if we don't always do a great job of it, we must try our best to point to the One who does know us fully and loves us more completely than we can comprehend.

Sharing in that sense of deep belonging is one of the most compelling reasons for church to exist at all. As Disciples, we are blessed with a Table at the center of our life that helps us make that real. This is God's house. You are welcome here.

Hallelujah and Amen.

But there's something in our scripture readings today that flips this idea inside out. It's not that it's pushing the opposite, but it might be asking us to look at the idea the other way around. We love the idea that God is inviting us to make ourselves at home – in the church, in the world, in the cosmos. But what if Jesus is asking us to invite God to make Godself at home? Think about all of those indicators that would make you feel at home. Can you imagine those applying to God? What would help God feel understood and appreciated and unconditionally accepted? Does God like comfy couches or mashed potatoes or a certain kind of flower? Does God need a basketball hoop out on the garage, or a craft room, or lots of streaming services to chill with? We actually don't have to wonder, because Jesus told us. It's right there in John, chapter 14. Jesus started out talking about God's house, yes, but by verse 23, he's talking about God making God's home with us. Or at least, maybe with us, if we can be those who keep Jesus' word. And what is that word? That word is love. When it comes down to it, love is what all of us need to feel at home, right?

Including God. There are so many beautiful ways that love can be expressed, but the love itself is what God is looking for.

How do we do that? “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home,” said Lydia. Humility. Hospitality. Openness to strangers. Willingness to listen to new ideas. “Love one another,” Jesus said. Which other? All others. What does it look like for you? Imagine that you are saying to God, “make yourself at home,” as you open up your heart and your home and your life. What do you mean by that? What extra efforts will you go to to make sure God will feel at home? If God is Love seeking love, how will love work in your life to welcome God in? How can you make sure God feels like family?

Now, there is danger here of the whole thing becoming a little too abstract. This may sound like the kind of “personal relationship with Jesus” that lets us feel the right feelings and get on with our lives, assured that Jesus is living in our hearts. “Relationship,” yes. But not personal, not in the sense of individual or private. Because our relationship with God, who is Love, is not just about us and God. The Love God wants to witness is not focused on Godself. Remember what Jesus said? “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my siblings, you did it to me.” If we want to welcome God home, we must welcome God’s people home. If we want God to make Godself at home with us, we must fling wide the doors of our homes, this home, and let Love flow freely.

Making God's people feel at home is going to mean listening as carefully as Lydia. We can't know what little details will help someone feel seen until we've gotten to know them. We can't be aware of which seemingly trivial acts of might trigger past traumas until people have come to trust us with their stories. We have this table here, and we bread Christ's bread and welcome all. But the more often we break bread in many places, and truly share our lives with one another, the better we will get at welcoming one another home into the house of God. The broader we stretch our hearts, the more room there will be for God to make a home here in our midst. We humble our hearts and ask if God has judged us faithful. And then we say, "Come and stay. Make Yourself at home!" Hallelujah and Amen.