

Grace and Peace to you all from God, our creator and redeemer – Amen.

When I meet with families after a loved one has passed away – we gather together to spend time sharing about the loss they have experienced, the beloved memories they will now hold so dear, and the ways the family would like to honor their loved one and entrust them to God within the funeral service.

In the midst of these gatherings two of the most requested scripture readings I receive as we plan together are Psalm twenty-three and Jesus teachings on God's eternal home from the fourteenth chapter of John. And in some ways, these requests never surprise me as both of these passages bring us much comfort and hope as people of faith during difficult times.

Psalm twenty-three's beautiful poetic lines speak of God's love, guidance, and care for us as a shepherd throughout our days. A shepherd who cares for us not only when everything is going just fine, but also when we are unsure of the road ahead. And in this way, the psalm also speaks of a God who is not afraid to go with us into the deepest and darkest of places of our lives - into the midst of our sorrow, our pain, and our grief. Which makes it easier for us to approach some of the hardest and most difficult times in our lives as people of faith.

Similarly, in the fourteenth chapter of John, we hear Jesus teaching us in the midst of the last supper that we are not to despair when we think upon his death or the loss of anyone we love – as Christ tells us himself - that he has gone to prepare a place for us all in his Father's house. Words of promise that help us to understand that we will never be separated from God even as we darken death's door and that Christ truly provides for us now and in the life to come.

While we do not know exactly how this comes to happen when we draw our last breath, we do hear these promises of God told throughout the scriptures – proclaiming to us that the love and grace of God, that has sustained us throughout our whole life, will not finish with our final breath - rather its final work will have just begun.

But this doesn't mean we still don't have questions about how this will happen when our life on this earth finally reaches its end and we are entrusted into Christ's resurrection. After all, the scriptures promise us many different things when it

comes to our life eternal and depending on your preferences some seem more exciting than others:

- The psalms let us know that heaven is God's Eternal dwelling place.
- The prophet Isaiah reassuringly promises us that when we go to be with God all of our tears and pain will be wiped away.
- And the book of Revelation promises us ceaseless and holy worship sessions with all the host of Heaven.

In the midst of these promises - it should be no surprise that there were some lingering questions even in Jesus' day about what it would mean to live out our lives with God in light of the resurrection.

And in our gospel lesson this morning we hear a prime example of this from some Sadducees, who were members of a Jewish sect that didn't believe in the resurrection. Instead, they held on to the promise God had made to them through their ancestors – starting with Abraham and Sarah, Rebecca and Isaac, Leah and Rachel and Jacob. A promise that they would become a great and numerous nation out numbering even the stars in the sky.

Which may also tell us something about their lingering concerns about marriage, child birth, and future generations that come up in our gospel lesson as well – because for the Sadducees - the hope of their immortality rested squarely on the shoulders of their children, and their children's children. A tangible sign of God's promise to them.

And I would say that this desire for a tangible knowable sign of God's promise is nothing new. For many of us who believe in the promise of the resurrection in one way or another – we still hold similar questions in our hearts. We want tangible proof of the afterlife. We want to know if what matters to us most now – our families and relationship - will be the same on the other side. We want to know what heaven is truly like because the truth of this life here and now is all that we know.

And while the prophets, psalmists, Christ, and even the disciples have tried to tell us that heaven is beyond our conception – a new world and life beyond the worries or fears we might hold - we can't help but think of the life to come in any terms other than the life we live now.

Which is why I think Jesus spends so much time in our gospel this morning trying to direct us away from nailing down our heavenly plans and instead to simply lean into the promises we have learned to trust and know from God. Held both in the waters of our baptism and in the body of blood of Christ's love held in communion - that God is the God of the living – both here and now, and also for those saints who have passed on from this world and are alive resting in God now.

It is through these tangible sacraments that Christ promises that nothing that has been placed into that hands of God will ever be let go. And that not even death, could separate us from the loving and eternal embrace of God.

While Jesus words may not comfort us by providing a blueprint for our life to come – Christ does point us to the one central matters of our faith that can calm our hearts in the midst of our questions and fears – that from the moment of our first breath to our last God has us – wholly and completely – promising us that we will never be let go from God's grace. Words that speak to our hearts because they tell of a God who can do the unimaginable – to make life out of death – joy from sorrow – and hope from despair.

And if Christ has similarly promised in our gospel lesson today that the ancestors of our faith Abraham and Sarah, Rebecca and Isaac, Leah and Rachel and Jacob are alive with God, then that promise must also rings true for us saints here and now and all those we love who have passed on.

While we may still have many questions about how this will come to be as our minds and lives are bound by our experiences on this world - we try to trust in the midst of those questions that God is not bound by our rules.

For in a world which is often marked by death and pain, God is about something more. Life – and life abundant. And while we may not completely understand how this can be – God isn't asking us to be able to perfectly explain the resurrection for it to be true for us today, tomorrow, or any day to come – God is simply asking us to lean into the promises of our faith: that we are all God's beloved and all are alive in God.

And may this be so among us – Amen.