

“Free to Love”

John 14:1-21 & 1 Peter 2:2-9

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When I worked as a Dairy Nutrition Consultant, I spent one week a month visiting dealers and farmers in North and South Dakota. I left Hudson, Wisconsin on a cloudy October afternoon, but I failed to check the weather before I left. Throughout my journey, the temperature plummeted and the wind grew in intensity. An hour east of Sioux Falls I was in a blizzard. I shifted the company Jeep Grand Cherokee into 4WD. I had an important presentation the next morning with a dealer that would significantly increase our sales and 40 farmer consultations scheduled. Farmers work no matter the weather so canceling an appointment with a farmer puts the business relationship in jeopardy. Twenty miles east of Sioux Falls there were only a few vehicles on the road. The snow was about a foot deep. I had a company issued cell phone that was the size of a shoe box. It only worked in a few locations in South Dakota. I had to stand outside and hold the antenna up to get crackling reception. We were only allowed to use it to call in a feeding ration. Even then the conversation was in shorthand code, because each minute was so expensive.

Driving in 4WD significantly lowers gas mileage. I needed gas in Sioux Falls; however, the storm started with rain earlier in the day which turned to ice, so there was no electricity in Sioux Falls. No electricity, no gas. I had one farm visit that evening, but as I approached I-29 to travel to the farm, the interstate was barricaded, closed. I didn't have GPS, so I used my trusty map to navigate in the blizzard to the farm. I arrived running on fumes. I had a great meeting with the farmer, the cows were healthy, milk production was up. I took feed samples, and we fine-tuned the cows diet. The farmer was so pleased he gave me a free tank of gas. As night descended, I arduously navigated via the side roads to Aberdeen. The snow was about 20 inches deep which was not too much for the jeep however trying to stay on the road with the whiteout and wind was a challenge. White knuckled, teeth clinched, and tense, I arrived at my hotel dreaming of a hot shower and rest. No electricity in Aberdeen. The power was out all day, so even the battery back-up lights were out. The receptionist lead me to my room with a flash night. It was pheasant season, so the hotel took in lots of stranded hunters. Since it was so cold, they allowed them to bring in their dogs who howled to one another all night long. No electricity, no heat, so I bundled up in all my clothes and every blanket and finally fell asleep. I awoke to pounding on the door. I had a phone call. I was lead back to the reception area. Leslie saw the weather and wanted to make sure I was safe. I got little snippets of sleep. I did not want to be late for my morning meeting. No electricity, long before smart phone, means no alarm clock. I opened wide the curtains so the sunrise would wake me. When I awoke, I could see my breath. There was a small snowdrift under the heating unit. I had the meeting with the dealer around a camping lantern. It was three days of misery.

In the spring of 2000, Leslie, newborn baby Spencer and I were traveling to Maumee, Ohio to meet the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee. Beth Sheets made all the travel arrangements. She booked us on a great flight and met us at the airport with a toy for Spencer and beverages and homemade cookies for Leslie and me. She transported us to a nice extended stay hotel that she had stocked with beverages, snacks, fruit, baby supplies, and a welcome sign. Beth covered every detail, childcare for Spencer, delicious meals, a Mudhen's baseball game, transportation, and time to rest. It was a marvelous trip.

Beth is an exceptional host. Jesus is the ultimate host. Our earthly life journey may be rough, difficult, and arduous. When we breathe our last earthly breath, Jesus guarantees the travel arrangements to heaven. Jesus is never late. God does not overbook heaven. God does not bump passengers. Jesus promises to take us to heaven where God, the ultimate host, greets us, fits us with our glorious, eternal resurrection body, gives us gifts of every kind, unites us with all people, and reveals all our loves and joys for us to savor and celebrate for eternity.

After Jesus foretold his crucifixion, washed the disciple's feet, enjoyed the Lord's Supper and urged them to love each other, to love everyone, Peter ask Jesus about the travel details. Jesus where are you going? Peter promised that he would go anywhere with Jesus, even if it meant death. Jesus foretold Peter's denial. Since our scripture today is a familiar passage from John 14 we are going to explore The Message paraphrase. Jesus is saying to you, **John 14:1-21 MSG "Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live. And you already know the road I'm taking."** Thomas said, "Master, we have no idea where you're going. How do you expect us to know the road?" Jesus said, "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know God. You've even seen God!" Philip said, "Master, show us the Father; then we'll be content." "You've been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don't understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, 'Where is the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren't mere words. I don't just make them up on my own. The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act. "Believe me: I am in my Father and my Father is in me. If you can't believe that, believe what you see—these works. The person who trusts me will not only do what I'm doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I've been doing. You can count on it. From now on, whatever you request along the lines of who I am and what I am doing, I'll do it. That's how the Father will be seen for the Father is in the Son. I mean it. Whatever you request in this way, I'll do. "If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to the Father, and God will provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take the Holy Spirit in because it doesn't have eyes to see God, doesn't know what to look for. But you know God already because God has been staying with you, and will even be in you! "I will not leave you orphaned. I'm coming back. In just a little while the world will no longer see me, but you're going to see me because I am alive and you're about to come alive. At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in my Father, and you're in me, and I'm in you. "The person who knows my commandments and keeps them, that's who loves me. And the person who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and make myself plain to them."

Knowing our final destination is glorious eternal life in heaven sets us free to love, to live life to the fullest. There is nothing that we can do, or not do, be or not be, that will diminish God's love for you or anyone. God loves each and every person perfectly. Jesus is our travel agent who guarantees a perfect landing in heaven, therefore do not let your hearts be troubled, do not be afraid, even if the earthly journey is rough, love extravagantly, live life abundantly.

Søren Kierkegaard said, "There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true." Believe Jesus' promise that there is a room prepared for you in heaven. Jesus will take you to heaven. God is with you always. It is easy to forget God's promises, to feel unloved, to become discouraged and afraid, such as when your best friend and leader, who you gave

up everything to follow, is being dragged off to jail, beaten, ridiculed, crucified, and buried. Jesus promised resurrection. Jesus urges us to not be troubled, not be afraid. Believe the promises of God. Love and live life to the fullest.

It has been said, "We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Jesus wants you to be certain of your spectacular, magnificent eternal life in heaven to set you free to love and live life to the fullest. Jesus came to assure us of resurrection, so we can celebrate God's joy and be filled with God's joy, so we can live life abundantly, so we can love extravagantly. The glory of God is a person living fully alive. You are created in the image of God to be creative, to dream dreams, to love, to rejoice, to bring out the God flavors of the cosmos, to laugh, to dance, to do what was previously impossible, to be wonderful by being yourself, unique, gifted, revealing eternally the image of God within you. Believe it. Live it. Take huge leaps of faith. What is the worst that can happen? The exact same as the best thing that will happen, glorious eternal life.

As a person and as a church we are not to be afraid to try new things and fail; not be afraid when people believe, act and live differently, not be afraid to welcome guest who will change our community, not be afraid to grow older, smaller, not be afraid to do things different, to do Hands-On Mission; for no matter what, we are all going to heaven so let's live life to the fullest and love extravagantly. Let's celebrate the love we have shared. Let's dream about how to love. Let's quickly take leaps of faith in following our dreams.

Curtis Almquist said, "Love your life, and when it is slipping away from you, know that what you have loved the most has simply whetted your appetite for what is to come. Bask in God's iridescent glory now; look to the glory to come. Glory, or to be glorified is to teem with God's light and life and it will last forever."

Peter wrote, **1 Peter 2:2-9 NRSV** "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to Jesus, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in God will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, Jesus is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into God's marvelous light."

Some people, do not believe, so their love is hindered, they stumble and fall. They do not do what they are destined to do, they play it safe, live small, sheltered, predictable lives, protecting their stuff, trusting only their perspective and trying to force their views on others. As a church, and as individuals, we are called to help them up, to echo Jesus' words, do not be afraid, God has a place for you in heaven so love and live abundantly.

Even though it is more complex and metaphoric, echo Peter's words. God our mother is nourishing everyone with spiritual milk, so we all will grow into perfect glorious members of God's family. On earth, we get just a minuscule taste of God's goodness. You are a living stone, connected to all people across time and space, unique in size and shape, built on the ever sure, steadfast, eternal foundation of Jesus. You are a living stone, a part of a sanctuary providing refuge, safety and place of

healing for all people. You are a living stone, a part of a temple where the blessings of God flow abundantly to bless all people, where the forgiveness, love, joy, peace, grace of God flow abundantly to invigorate all people. You are chosen, called, ordained, commissioned by God. You are being woven into harmony with all people. You are being assured that you are a beloved, cherished, essential member of God's family in order that you can share the grace of God, reveal the love of God and embody the joy of God who is dispersing every form of darkness, pain, longing, fear and death with luminous light, ceaseless celebration, dynamic completeness, dazzling love and brilliant, abundant eternal life. Amen