**[Jesus said to the disciples], “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, 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 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.” (John 14:1–14, NRSV)**

Grace and peace to you from God our father and from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Our gospel lesson is a very common gospel lesson for funerals. Jesus says to his disciples do not let your hearts be troubled believe in God believe also in me in my father's house there are many dwelling places if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself so that where I am, there you may be also. Here we have the continuation of Jesus’ what's often called Jesus’ farewell discourse to his disciples. He's preparing them for his departure and he's letting them know that yes he is going to the father but in a way he'll always be present with them as we of course remember from Matthew, “Remember I'm with you always to the end of the age (till the end of time). So here in John we have these wonderful words of comfort again. It's not accidental that they're often used in funerals because they're reminding us that Jesus in coming to give us eternal life especially when we're thinking about Jesus in John, we have to remember that eternal life does not exclude today it includes today a lot of times people, when they hear Jesus talk about eternal life, they think about by and by up in the sky. No eternity includes today. It includes now and that, for me anyway makes it all the more comforting to talk about it in those terms. So, when Jesus talks about going to prepare a place for us in a way this is also just kind of like a full circle from the very beginning of the gospel of John, right? From the beginning of the gospel of John,one of my favorite points in a Christmas Eve service is when we are lighting the candles and we hear that prolog to the Gospel from John 1:

“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*” (John 1:1–5, NRSV) … “*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.*” (John 1:14, NRSV)

…and when we hear those words, another way to think of those words, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” is that Jesus came and tabernacled among us. He pitched a tent. When Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt, they would set up tabernacles or tents to be the place of meeting for worship. The tents would house the presence of God. Jews have the festival of Tabernacles to this day.

So we think of what Jesus did in pitching a tent with us, Tabernacling among us, dwelling among us the word becoming flesh. Now he's saying to the disciples I go to prepare a place for you, a dwelling place. In my father's house there are many dwelling places so now that he has already dwelt with us, he is preparing a place for us to dwell with him that where he goes there we may be also. So yes, that of course talks about life in heaven - afterlife with Jesus and the Father, and the spirit. It also talks about how he's present, Jesus, right here among you and me, so let that be of comfort to you.

While we're at this point of words of comfort I would certainly be remiss if I didn't mention mom's on this special Mother's Day. And I think that this gospel is a very fitting gospel to hear on Mother's Day. And I get to thinking about - call me sentimental and you wouldn't be wrong - but I got to thinking about how when I was a kid and my brothers and I especially my younger brother and I (Doug and I). Our oldest brother, George was five years older than me so every once in awhile we got to hang out with George and his friends and play baseball and stuff and softball. but more often we would play (Doug and I) would often play at Senn high school (which was a good city block away from our house) where we lived in an apartment at the time. Up until my sophomore year in high school, then we moved to a house. But my mother could belt out, “Kevin, Douglas come home, supper!” She could belt that out and everybody in the neighborhood knew. It was way before cell phones, young folks… so that was the way my mom called us to supper. This one of the dear memories I have of my childhood. Another one, of course was just as Jesus spoke these comforting words to the disciples in the upper room during his farewell discourse, moms also are that parent who really are the comforter among the most parents, right? I know that with Tina, when my daughters have a hard time falling asleep - every once in a while I might be able to do something - but one of the magic things my mom would always do is, she would read to us “Wynken, Blynken and Nod.” “Wynken, Blynken and Nod one night sailed off in a wooden shoe sailed on a River of crystal light over the waves of dew..” I had it memorized at one point and I won't because I don't know it for sure now but I do know that, overtime I memorized it so I could say those words to my daughters. And I remember our oldest she got into fits where she didn't even want to hear it. “No Wynken, Blynken!” she would say to me when I tried to calm her down at bedtime. It was kind of cute as I remember. That's what mom would read to us and every once in a while I'd be trying to drift off to sleep and she would do the thing that moms do, right? Stroke your hair behind (back when I had hair) back behind your ear, while you're trying to drift off to sleep. So those are a couple of the many wonderful memories I have of what my mom would do to calm us down at night to get us to sleep. So, on Mother’s Day, as we celebrate Mother’s and their comforting role in our lives, it's fitting that we hear these words of comfort that Jesus gives his disciples before he knows he's to depart from this world before the crucifixion.

This, what Jesus is telling them, this farewell discourse, happens on Maundy Thursday, the night in which he's betrayed. So, Jeus tells them, “you know the way I'm going.” Thomas says, “how can we know the way?” and Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except by me.” Here's where we have what can be a matter of some controversy because more often than not a lot of people, especially one of the podcasts I listen to when I prepare to preach a sermon, is from a couple of guys Delmer Chilton and John Fairless, I listen to them, and they had a wonderful discussion about this. Especially John Fairless who comes from the evangelical community and they love to focus on the “scandal of particularity,” which indeed is part of being a Christian. It is. It's part of being a Christian to know and proclaim that Jesus “is the way the truth and the life everlasting.” John Fairless pointed out that he tries very hard (as do I) to try to look at that in a way that's not quite as exclusive as it is inclusive. And John Fairless remembered a book by Eugene Peterson called “The Jesus Way.” John Fairless quoted this – “I remembered a passage that I read in Eugene Peterson’s, “The Jesus Way” a couple of years ago he talked specifically about this John 14:6 text – “I'm the way the truth and the life” and Peterson says the Jesus way wedded to the Jesus truth brings about the Jesus life. we cannot proclaim the Jesus truth but then do it any old way we like nor can we follow the Jesus way without speaking the Jesus truth. But Jesus as the truth gets far more attention than Jesus as the way Jesus as the truth is the most frequently used among Christians with whom I have worked for 50 years as Peterson as a North American pastor in the text that Jesus sets before us so clearly and definitively the way comes first. So I think it was meant - Jesus as the truth - so basically we have the truth, and you better believe the way we believe otherwise you're going to go to hell.” How persuasive is that? It's not very persuasive, and it's not really the way Jesus would encourage us ( I don't think) to try to spread the good new among people. It's more of an invitation. “The way” comes first in the book of the Acts of the Apostles we hear that The Christians before they're even called Christians are called “people of the way.” We can't skip the way of Jesus in our hurry to get to the truth of Jesus as he is worshipped and proclaimed. The way of Jesus is the way that we practice and come to understand the truth of Jesus living in our homes and workplaces with our friends and family. Now, it's a way of hospitality. It's a way of serving. It's a way, again remember the way of Jesus is NOT to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. So in the same way we are called to live sacrificial lives. We are called to lives of sharing with people.

And sharing with people in ways more than just our financial resources, although that's important. But also sharing each other's joys but also our burdens. As I mentioned before about Mother's Day, I think I would also be remiss if I did not mention that one of the things I knew very early on when I answered the call to ministry and when I went to clinical pastoral education in the hospital, was that the most challenging thing I'd ever have to face is ministering to people who've lost a child by death. I do not know what people who have lost children would do if they didn't have a faith community to lean on. During those very tough times, throughout my years as a pastor, just hearing about how - not just about how painful it was for the parents - but also how much their church community was there for them to lean on during that time of grief, is an important thing for us all. And that's really that's what it means this side of heaven to rely on Christ and his body, the church. Your brothers and sisters in the pews next to you or (at least at this time anyway, temporarily) the folks that you say hi to on Facebook) but the point is we can't we can't be the community of Jesus, we can't follow the way of Jesus – “the way, the truth and the life.” without the way of Jesus being primary. Without the way of Jesus being what drives us, what knits us together. Jesus being the one through whom we love everyone - love our neighbors, our brothers and sisters and lean on them, as you lean on Jesus in prayer. And so, the way is primary. The truth - if you don't get the way right, people won't care about the truth. Especially in this day and age, the field called apologetics is basically the practice of persuading unbelievers to your way of feeling and following Jesus. This yearning to be less exclusive and more inclusive is an important part of proclaiming the good news, of sharing the good news of Jesus, especially if we are to see the church grow.

And Speaking of coming not to be served but to serve we have Saint Stephen and his martyrdom actually in our lesson from Acts, our first lesson. We hear how he's doing the work necessary to help spreading the word of God and acts of mercy - he and other deacons like him. That's what they do. We at Saint John, as a congregation with Steven ministers, we do know a bit about what all that means, doing acts of mercy helping in the ministry of the church and those are important. What Stephen and the other deacons did was vital to the ministry of the church so vital that in the midst of him right after he said a long sermon people just couldn't stand it there were people who refused to believe and they cover their ears and with a loud shout all rushed together against him, yet he still kept proclaiming Jesus and his love, and in the midst of being stoned Stephen’s witness is parallel (not by accident) to the witness Jesus himself gave from the cross. Stephen says, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” That's an echo of what Jesus said, “Father, forgive them they don't know what they're doing.” The good news for Steven, and for us, is that he was able to say in the midst of all the clamor and the chaos look, I see the heavens opened and the son of man standing at the right hand of God. So Jesus knew what his servant Steven did. He also knew about this young man, Saul…and yet, Jesus would later blind Saul (later Paul) Saul of Tarsus. Blind him on the road to Damascus and even use Paul (Saul) who was an instrument of the enemy of the church - and used Paul to be the preacher to the gentiles, the Apostle to the gentiles. And so we see it all unfolding here, and it all comes from that acknowledgment that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Following the way of Jesus, his humble, gentle way of serving others, may we go forth at this point in Eastertide. For Jesus is risen! At this point in Eastertide, we are looking forward to the ascension. Jesus says, “I am going to the father…” and so the lessons from here on out will be having that focus. In the midst of it all we still remember that HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN, INDEED! and happy Mother's Day to all the moms out there. God bless.