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 Fourth Sunday Lent

Mosaic: God Uses our Responsibilities
John 14:1-7

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe^[a] in God; believe also in me. ²In 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?^[b] ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going."^[c] ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "**I am the way and the truth and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know^[d] my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*

For four weeks we've been studying Shane Stanford's book,
"Mosaic: When God Uses All the Pieces".

In this fourth week of Lent the focus is how ***God Uses our RESPONSIBILITIES***—
 to make a mosaic masterpiece of our lives.

But what does it ***MEAN that God uses our RESPONSIBILITIES?***

Well, it's another way of saying that we ***NEED*** one another.

We are ***built for human connection***.

This is a very powerful statement in a ***world full of people who are LONELY***.

So many people feel disconnected.

They long for belonging and community.

Stanford is saying that we all have a part to play in fixing that,

Because we all have people for whom ***we are responsible***.

We all have people we are called to care for, and love—

just like Jesus loves and cares for us.

Some of those people might even be complete strangers!

This is one of the ***most powerful aspects of church life, isn't it?***—

being responsible for each other.

Showing that love and care.

Of course we are not Jesus,
 So, we don't always get it right.
 But we are called to love to the best of our ability,
 We are called to ***be responsible for one another***—
 because Jesus is responsible for us.

We are called to ***make SPACE for one another***—
 in our homes, and hearts, in our communities and workplaces,
 and especially in our church.
 This is what these first few verses of John 14 are all about.

Rev. John Odegard tells the story of making space for others,
 During a big camping trip with friends.
 They went to the Boundary Waters Wilderness of Minnesota,
 on the border with Canada—in an area of over one million acres of
 beautiful lakes, streams, waterfalls, and trees.

Unlike their usual trips, where they would pack very light, in backpacks,
 because transportation is by canoe,
 this time they packed for 'glamping'—with ***extra everything***—
 chairs, big tents, plenty of food and games, even a small table, and fresh coffee.
 They wanted to make the most out of this trip,
 And set up a 5-star campsite!
 They planned to be gone for several days.

And they expected to be all ALONE, secluded, out in the woods.
 But to their surprise, one morning they heard another boat slamming
 up against the shore.
 They looked up and saw two worn out and weary people—
 A couple who had basically washed up on the shore
 after a harrowing ordeal on the lake.

They had been caught in the high waves until their boat flipped over,
 half of their belongings were lost--their tent, their clothes, and more.
 They clung to what they could hold on to for several hours
 in the freezing water.
 Floating in the wind and the waves until they finally
 found a large rock to climb onto.
 Eventually they got their boat turned upright,
 and arrived on shore near John's campsite.

When they saw the group, **they apologized** for crashing the party, and asked only for a place to rest a bit, and directions for getting home.

Pastor John immediately thought of Jesus' words in John Chapter 14:

*Do not let your hearts be troubled,
I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go,
I will come again, so that where I am there you will be also."*

Suddenly it was obvious WHY they had brought tons of camping gear, and lots of EXTRA supplies.

God had prepared their place for these strangers who needed help. They welcomed the couple to eat with them, rest, and they spent the night—in one of the extra tents they had grabbed at the last minute.

Odegard says: *we begged them to please stay, because even though they had lost their tent and sleeping bag, we had an extra of each of those by accident. We had plenty of warm clothes to share, and we had marshmallows to roast. So, these two found themselves in a place prepared unknowingly just for them for the night, and after a hearty breakfast, two of us went with them to make sure they found themselves safely home.I called to check in a few days later, ...and it turns out someone found their bag.... But what is most incredible is that the people who found that bag also flipped their canoe..., and lost their own tent. They ended up using this one they had found to keep warm for the night. Even this lost bag ended up exactly where it needed to be **to prepare a space for someone else.***

Rev. John Odegard, *Making Room*, day1.org, May 7, 2023.

I wonder, when has God used you to care for someone else?

When has God used you to **unexpectedly welcome** someone,
To help them or serve them?

We're all called to be responsible for one another.

To love and care for one another.

And in the Gospel passage today,

Jesus is speaking to his disciples about that kind of love and care.

He's talking to them on his last night before he goes to the cross.

This is after he has washed their feet at the Last Supper,

after he tells them to love one another as he has loved them.

So, this passage in John 14 is a continuation of Jesus' words about love, and responsibility.

He has shown them his love,
 he has urged them to love one another,
 and he has told them that he is going away.
 Now he says that he is going to ***prepare a PLACE*** for them.
 He is going to care for them, even after he's gone.

But the passage has ***lost a bit in translation*** into English.
 Like when Jesus says *in my Father's house are many dwelling places*,
 The Greek word for ***house oikia*** is more than a physical house.
 It describes *a home, and those who dwell there, in other words, a household*.
 Jesus is saying that in his Father's household, are many rooms.

And that word for ***dwelling place or room is monai***—
 which again, is more than a physical space—
 it's a place to abide, to dwell, to endure.

So, Jesus is saying that he is preparing a place for his followers
 Not in a physical house, but in the ***family of God***, the ***household*** of faith,
 and it's a place where ***we can dwell, and truly abide with God***.
 This is about our ***relationship, love, and connection*** to Jesus.

When Jesus goes on to say, "I am the way, the truth and the life"—
 the Greek word for ***way—hodos--*** is not a physical road,
 it's a ***journey or a way of life***.
 Jesus is saying that HE is our way of life.
 His way of life and love, is our way of life and love.
 His responsibility for us, is our responsibility for one another.
 That is truth.
 That is life.

***It's almost like Jesus is saying that he himself is a sanctuary—
 a place to dwell!***

So we should ask ourselves:
 Are we dwelling in Him?
 Are we abiding in Jesus Christ?
 Where ARE we dwelling today?
 Do we feel connected to Jesus?

***In the next chapter of John, chapter 15,
Jesus will say that he is the Vine and we are the branches,
and we should ABIDE in him.***

Same root word as dwelling place here.

In other words, we should stay connected to Jesus.

That's the ***best way for us to learn true loving responsibility*** for one another.

By staying connected to Jesus Christ.

The Vine.

The one who makes a dwelling place for us.

The One who is the way, truth, and life.

So, HOW do we connect?

Through the Word, prayer, worship, study, and fellowship.

If that's the case, how close do you feel to Jesus?

If not close enough, how can we draw closer?

Stanford in his Mosaic book,

says that God teaches us how to be responsible for one another.

When we are close to God, we learn how to love each other.

He says that God teaches us the importance of BELONGING AND PLACE.

Jesus often spoke about places.

He was thoughtful about where we went, and where he ministered.

He loved to go to people's homes—where he created safe and loving space.

Think of him going to the home of Zaccheus, the chief tax collector.

***You know how we can all think of a 'HAPPY PLACE' in our minds,
a place where we have felt total joy?***

Maybe you've been asked to think about that place during a scary situation,

Or maybe you just go there in your mind while visiting the dentist, like I do!

God is the one who gives us a safe and happy place!

And we have the responsibility to create that kind of place for others.

I wonder, ***how do you create good space***—in your life?

How do you make your home, your office, your classroom, your community—
a safe space?

God also teaches us the importance of ***CONNECTING to people, and places***—
kind of like the ***home of a beloved grandparent who spoils us.***

It's a grandparent's prerogative, and some would say responsibility,

to spoil their grandkids, right?

Similarly, Jesus ‘spoils’ us, with his love, and grace—free and unearned gifts.

Who do you spoil like that?

Who do you shower with love and grace?

And how is God asking you to do that for someone else?

God also teaches us the ***importance of WELCOMING one another---***

Stanford talks about the power of walking into an unfamiliar church, and being welcomed, like a member of the family.

Sometimes churches refer to themselves as family, and they do a poor job of displaying real love.

Other times, they truly treat you like you belong, that you are welcome, that everyone is happy to have you.

I wonder, how do we welcome others—

in our homes, offices, classrooms, and communities?

Is EVERYONE welcome?

How do we welcome EVERYONE in this church?

Who feels like they belong, and who doesn’t?

Finally, God teaches us the ***importance of being HONEST with each other—***

the way our closest family members can be brutally honest with us.

Jesus is honest with us—if we are listening and paying attention.

Jesus convicts us of our failures and sins, showing us the way to new and everlasting life.

How are YOU honest with the people in your life?

How do you ***speak the truth—in love?***

Where might God be asking you to do that?

Shane Stanford, *Mosaic: When God Uses All the Pieces*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2011, pages 42-50.

You know, we all have a ***SPHERE of influence—***

people who are watching us, listening to us, and following us, regardless of who we are or what we’re doing.

It’s a big responsibility when you think about it, isn’t it?

And we all have it—whether we want it, or not!

So, what are we doing to HONOR that responsibility?

How are we using our influence for good?

How do we create safe space?
 How do we shower others with love and grace?
 How do we welcome everyone?
 And are we honest—with ourselves and others?

***What if the place that Jesus has prepared for us--
 Is a place to love and help others?***

What if these words in John 14 are not just about heaven?
 What if they are not just describing places prepared for us when we die?
 What if they are describing life right now?
 What if the place that Jesus has prepared for us,
is the place where we can love God and neighbor?

Where is that place, for you?

How is God using your responsibilities to make a ***mosaic masterpiece?***
 We all know we're not perfect.
 We won't always welcome and love and treat others honestly.

But we are called to be responsible for each other.

Just as Jesus is for us.
 And God will use all the pieces of those relationships and places and spaces,
 to make a beautiful mosaic of our lives!

***We are all responsible for one another,
 And we are all the product of those who were responsible for us.***

The great news is, that's not the end of our story.
 God is in our story.
 God is in control,
 And God is good—all the time.

Shane Stanford sums this up very simply.
 He says: We are ***responsible*** for one another.
 We are ***God's children***.
 And we are ***family***.

Now, how can we LIVE THAT OUT, today?

That is our Good News of the Gospel.

We have been called to care for one another,
To be responsible for each another,
Because Jesus loves and cares for us.
When we are responsible for others,
we are embodying God's loving responsibility for us.

May we live out that calling, with joy!

And all God's people said, Amen.