

***Alleluia! Christ is Risen!***

Growing up I didn't know much about getting married, but I did know one thing for certain; a groom carries his bride over the threshold of the honeymoon suite. Already by the age of ten or so, I'd seen this ritual performed countless times on television. Along with everybody else I knew that you carry a bride into the honeymoon suite; what happens after that I had no idea.

A show of hands: ***How many of you carried or were carried across a bridal threshold when you got married?***

***Can anyone tell me why?***

There are lots of explanations as to where this tradition originates, but the oldest dates back to the ancient near east. Accordingly, after making a marriage contract with the bride's father the groom to be returned to his father's house where he added a room to the house for him and his bride; ***he goes to prepare a place for their life together.*** When the room is completed – and typically inspected by both fathers for sufficiency – the groom returns at an undesignated time to carry the bride away from her father's house to her new home.

Widely divergent opinions of the bride's willing participation in this practice exist. Some suggest that the bride had no say in the matter, meaning she did not necessarily go willingly. Others suggest that the bride had to be carried – over the shoulder – to demonstrate her unwillingness to leave the shelter of her father's home.

Once inside the newly prepared home, the groom would put the bride down, and they would begin their life together. What happens after that – I have no idea.

Last fall in our Table Talk series and then in our Advent Wednesday series we learned about *Jesus the Bridegroom*, and discovered many first century Jewish marriage customs.

We also learned that Jesus frequently speaks of himself as the bridegroom and often employs images associated with weddings: *wedding banquets*, 10 bridesmaids and their lamps, *the procession of the bride and groom to their new home* prepared by the groom for their new life together, and *perhaps most notably this morning, the groom's gift to his betrothed, and his promise to return and take her there.*

My point is not to bog us down in countless details this morning, but rather *demonstrate that Jesus's roots His words to us this morning in a very real image rather than some vague reference to rooms in heaven.*

Even more critically, *Jesus seems intent this morning on letting us in on the secret of exactly what is supposed to happen once He – the bridegroom – returns to take us to that newly prepared place of which He speaks.*

Jesus says all of this before His death and resurrection. So question before us is: *has He returned already to take us to the place prepared in the Father's house, or is that yet to come?*

I believe I can confidently answer this question. *Has He returned already to take us to the place prepared in the Father's house, or is that yet*

*to come?*

**“Yes”** – to both.

Here’s **the crux of the matter**. Jesus is speaking of His quickly approaching Passion, death and resurrection – *of preparing a new space in which His bride – the Church or people of God – will be able to begin a new life together – to live with Him.*

Jesus isn’t going ahead of His disciples – us included – to make room reservations for each of us. *He goes to create a new space in which we can live out our growing* love for Him and each other.

Unfortunately, English is not very precise in the second person. We can never tell if Jesus is referring to you – as in “you,” Charlotte Surridge (Happy Birthday by the way) or “you” as in “yous guys” as they say in New Jersey. Fortunately, there is no such confusion in Greek. All the yous in our reading are plural – “yous guys.”

**Why does that matter?**

*It matters because the place Jesus has gone ahead of to prepare is a place for all of us to live together in love, not a place for me to live individually in my love for Jesus.*

That place has already been prepared for us – not to live in later, as in when we die – but now together.

*On the cross Jesus confronts all that separates us from God and each other, sin, death and the devil* as Luther would say, and the fear of those things which would have us act selfishly towards one another. Those things no longer have power over Jesus – into whose resurrection life we have been baptized –so they need no longer have

power over us. Jesus demonstrates the way of mercy and forgiveness that leads to abundant fruitful living, and it is ours if we believe in Christ's victory over these things. Christ has set us free to live without fear, but and given us the tools to do so. The place is already prepared. We need only live in it with Him.

It's *not fully realized yet* – life free from sin with Jesus and the Father – *but it's ours to live when we live unselfishly with mercy and forgiveness*. When we live amongst one another as Jesus teaches, we can catch a glimpse of that fully realized future with God. *In the meantime, we can live with the certain knowledge that "All that belongs to the bridegroom Jesus has bestowed on us; it is ours forever*. And everything we (the bride) have – sin, selfishness, fear, brokenness Jesus has taken upon Himself because their lives are now one. It's the happy exchange.

Since all that is settled. I suppose we return to the unresolved question – what happens after the bride is carried across the threshold and put down to begin a new life.

What happens after that?

I think I have an idea.

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