

Adam surveyed the wreckage. He'd left a big mess behind him. First, he'd disobeyed God. Then, he tried to cover it up. And to make matters worse, Adam blamed his wife for his mistakes. Sin after sin, one after another, his transgressions were piling up fast.

Only moments before, Adam had the world at his fingertips. He was leading a full life. He never wanted for anything. Best of all, Adam shared a happy home with his heavenly Father. But now in the blink of an eye, everything changed.

Adam's sin was quickly growing out of control. It left no room for him in the Garden of Eden. It pushed Adam out and forced him to leave. Worst of all, it came between him and his Creator God.

Hanging his head in shame, Adam lifted his eyes and took in what lay before him. It was a barren wasteland—nothing but thorns and thistles as far as the eye could see. He turned back and said goodbye to everything good in his life. This was the point of no return—never again would he come back home.

Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore either. I mean, do you ever get homesick? I sure do. Each and every day. It's that feeling in the pit of your stomach that the world's not right. That lonely feeling of always being out of place, never fitting in anywhere. That unsettled feeling in your gut like you're lost and don't know where to go. If you've ever felt like that before, you know what it's like to miss home. Deep down your heart aches to find a way back. But with our big pile of sin standing in the way, we can't.

Oh sure, we still try. We make a molehill out of a mountain. Like, we'll look at it and say it's not so big. We attempt scaling it, finding a way to climb over it. We join the Pharisees and think if we only try harder, live a moral life, we can overcome this thing. But despite our best efforts, we still add sins to the pile. So, as we're scrambling higher and higher, thinking we're almost to the top, the top is just getting taller and taller out of reach. Until we realize there's no way over such a hurdle!

Or, we'll decide there's gotta be a way to shrink it. That is, if with each sin it grows, then maybe with each act of holiness it'll get smaller. After all, you can reduce a debt by making payments, can't you? Like a Sadducee, we try our hand at offering sacrifices to God, paying more in temple tax, and making sure to say our prayers. But it's no use—being sinners and all, there's no such thing as a genuinely pure and holy work. Try as we might, there's no way we can even make a dent!

Or another strategy we often try is to make-believe all those sins aren't even there. We play games with moral relativism, act like nobody has the right to judge us. And believing that our sins really aren't all that bad, we assume God won't think so either. A lot of people in our world like to pretend that way. But when it comes to God, I don't need to tell you just how silly that reasoning is.

At the end of the day, there are our sins—still standing. That big obstacle, getting in the way of us and our home with God. So, out of options—is there any other way out of this mess we've made for ourselves? Well, the Bible says no. The problem is too big for us. Any attempt would be in vain. There's just no way!

Until today. In the Gospel this morning, Jesus clears His throat. He says, "In my Father's house are many rooms. 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, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."

We went along listening, nodding our heads, daydreaming about Jesus making everyone's bed and laying mints on our pillows—it sounds so nice. But then, suddenly Jesus' words dawn on us, especially his last statement—"And you know the way to where I am going." We join Thomas in asking, "Wait, Lord—what? We don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" After all, believe me, we've tried. Everything we do is a desperate attempt at carving out a little piece of heaven for ourselves, but it hasn't worked yet. No way, no how.

But into our hopeless situation, Jesus offers a sliver of hope. Into the darkness of our despair, Jesus lets in a little crack of light. He says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. [You’re right,] no one comes to the Father . . . except through Me.”

Any historians here this morning? Ever heard of the Transcontinental Railroad? It was built between the years 1863-1869, in an effort to join the eastern and western halves of the United States. But when they got to places like the Sierra Nevada they found they had one big problem—MOUNTAINS! You see, trains can’t climb steep slopes—they need flat terrain. So, how were they going to lay the track with all these big obstacles in the way? Their solution—DYNAMITE! If nature wouldn’t provide a way for them, then they’d blast their way through and make their own path.

Well, God has never really liked this distance between us very much either. He’s been itching to join together the earthly half and the heavenly half of His creation once again. But, of course, there’s just one big problem—you see, getting in the way is our mountain of sin. So, He’s cooked up a way to get rid of it. His solution—JESUS!

Putting Jesus in the middle of our mess on the cross, God planted His Son like a stick of dynamite. Striking a match, He lit the fuse of our salvation. Jesus was now set to detonate in 3-2-1. 3 . . . The voice of Jesus exploded from His throat as He cried out to God. 2 . . . Blood erupted from His veins where the nails had punctured through. 1 . . . Giving up His spirit, life itself blasted out of Jesus—BOOM! But when the smoke cleared and the dust settled that first Easter morning—well, you should’ve seen it.

Sin was blown to smithereens. The earth shook and rocks split. The temple curtain tore in two. At the empty tomb, the stone was rolled away. And now, heaven had been burst wide open. At long last, Jesus was the way!

For those of us who mourn the loss of loved ones in the faith, this is a comfort. This means they’ve made it home. And for everyone who will one day face death, this a comfort also for us. When the time comes, we can be sure we’ll make it home too. But still, what about in the meantime?

Last week, I ran across one of the most breathtaking worship spaces I’ve ever seen. It’s called The Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Massachusetts—just along Cape Cod. As you can see from the photos in your bulletin, entering the sanctuary is like entering the Garden of Eden. Just look—there’s Adam and Eve waiting to greet you at the front door. Then, opening those doors, Paradise itself is open to you. The baptismal font welcomes you into a new life brimming with divine blessing. Then, strolling down the main aisle, God’s Word nourishes you as it’s read from the ambo. When you reach the chancel, the altar invites you to have a sacred encounter. And finally, the apse with the mosaic of Jesus, bids you to eat from the Tree of Life with its twelve kinds of fruit—its leaves for the healing of the nations. Throughout the sanctuary—up and down, down and up; from the altar to the font and from the font to the altar—flows the River of Life and grows the Tree of Life.

But it’s what’s above Jesus that really struck me. Look directly over His head and you’ll find a gateway, some kind of glowing portal. No doubt, the open door indicates Jesus is the Way to heaven. But looking at it, you’ve got to wonder. Aren’t we already there? I mean, in that place the Lamb is reigning in glory! The River of life pours from His throne! There’s access to the Tree of Life with its fruit of immortality! Best of all, God’s very presence can be experienced without a single impediment!

That’s enough to make me see that door a little differently. I reinterpret it not just as the way by which Jesus is bringing us home, like an exit from this world into another. But also the way by which Jesus already brings home to us, like an entrance for heaven to come among us. Which means that the Church is more than just a church. It’s the place where heaven and earth kiss. Maybe that’s why the earliest Christians were nicknamed after their Lord. From the very beginning, the Book of Acts says that the Church was known as The Way. If Jesus is the Way, then the people He gathers together also become The Way.

Friends, in this place, you and I get a taste of heaven. It’s in the Church, after all, that God gives us a slice of home here and now. Paradise is opened to us as the River of Life spills into this very baptismal font. Eating Christ’s true body and

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blood, we receive the Tree of Life's healing fruits. And by the power of His Holy Word, we are regenerated, our lives transformed, and we become the people we were created to be.

This day, as you've come again to God's house, let me be the first to stay, "Welcome home!"