

In the name of the the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Often in life I've found we can miss the significance, the deeper meaning of the things that are happening around us. There are important things that we miss because they're not lying on the surface. They're hidden, deeper layers of meaning that we need to peel back that are lying there to be discovered. I had an example of this when I was at Seminary in Cambridge. Two years after I got there a young woman, Laura, who's now my wife, arrived and she would come and watch the soccer team, the college soccer team in which I played. This carried on deep into the winter as the weather got colder, and windier, and Cambridge is a very cold place, and I still admire this new California girl who'd come amongst us and her determination to understand English culture and the rules of our national game, the passion for the sport that she was showing, standing there week after week as the weather got bitterly cold, the sole supporter of our college football team.

How wrong I was. After we started dating at the start of the next term do you know how many games she came to see? None. I played every week for 23 seasons after that. She never came to a single game. She didn't because she wasn't standing on the touch line to learn more about soccer. She was checking me out. I completely missed the deeper, underlying meaning of Laura's soccer watching.

John's gospel, from which our reading for today is drawn, is full of deep, underlying meaning. There's layer upon layer of meaning in this book and in that reading. It's very easy to miss the rich things that are being said. We can just pass over them. There's a lot going on in that relatively short gospel reading. It's a typically rich, dense passage from St. John. It's a great passage for this time of year, which is one of the busiest times in our liturgical calendar because it includes so many things for this season. For example, this week we celebrate the Festival of Ascension. Forty days after Easter we remember Jesus' return to heaven. That's in this

reading as Jesus talks of returning to the Father and going away from His disciples.

Then, the week after that we celebrate Pentecost, the celebration of the coming of the Spirit upon the disciples. That, too, is mentioned in the passage as Jesus talks about the Father sending the Spirit, the advocate in His name. Then, the week after that is Trinity Sunday. In this passage, it's a Trinitarian passage, all three members of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, play a role. There's lots of possibilities, lots of things that a preacher could develop in this passage. I'm going to focus on one word that you may have missed, because it doesn't look like a significant word. It's a word which keeps appearing in John's gospel. In fact, it could be said to be a key word. As we look at this word it contains all of John's thinking and His theology. They're all contained in this one phrase.

The Greek word that John uses in the original is *menō* and it comes throughout the gospel, and it's in this reading. We can miss it because it's translated in many different ways with many different English words. For John it's a very important word that carries all this weight of meaning. I'll peel back the layers of meaning this morning on that one word. It comes in our passage, and it's translated in our passage as "make our home." So we read this, "Those who love me," Jesus says, "will keep my Word and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them." The word for make our home is that Greek word *menō*. It's a lovely image. God will come and make His home with His people. This verse represents something of a high point in the gospel if we've seen what's gone before it. It's the significance of the word that's used, *menō*. The significance of that word emerges throughout the gospel, and we understand its full significance here, if we see how John has been using it.

I want to go back to the beginning and unpack that word and see why it's so significant when we read it in this passage, as we have done today. I'll trace its development, peel back the layers, and I need to start in chapter 1 of John's gospel. That's where

this word first appears. Two disciples ask Jesus the question, "Rabbi, where are you staying," it's translated but the question is, "Where are you menō?" It would seem to be a straightforward question. It's close to being asked, "Where are you from? Where do you reside? Where do you call home?" Of course, Jesus, like us, could answer that in several ways. He could say, "Well, I'm from Bethlehem," or "I was brought up in Nazareth. I'm from there," or this story's happening in Bethany. He could say, "Well, I'm staying just down the road there."

He doesn't give a straightforward answer. When they say, "Where are you staying," He replies, "Come and see." That's an invitation to the reader of the gospel, as well as those first disciples to read on, to find out, to follow Jesus, to see where He's from, where He dwells, where He resides, where He menō. The whole book can be read as a gradual unveiling of Jesus' identity and an explanation of where it is that He resides.

We move forward and we come to chapter 14 and 15 which this passage is from, and those chapters are full of scores of reference to this word menō. Let me pick out chapter 14, verse 10. Jesus says, "Do you not believe that I'm 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." You can't tell, but the English word that there is translated "dwell" is that same word from chapter 1 and from our passage it's that word, again, menō. It's translated here as dwells or living in. Jesus says, "The Father dwells," abides, menō, rests "in me." This verse is one of those verses which makes incredible claims about who Jesus is. "I am in the Father and the Father is in me," He says. Elsewhere He says, "I and the Father are one. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," or to put it in the terms of this verse, the Father is staying in Jesus. Jesus resides, dwells in the Father.

John's going further here than any of the other gospel writers in identifying Jesus as sharing in God's divinity. He stresses the distinctiveness of

Jesus from His Father but also their unity. He doesn't use the word Trinity, but he's opening up the development of that doctrine. In versus like chapter 14, verse 10, he's stating the answer to the disciples' question, "Where is Jesus staying? Where is He from?" Here we start to get an answer. He's from God. He's of God. God dwells in Him in a unique way. John's use of the word menō doesn't end here. It has a third appearance and significance in the passage that we read today. John has established that Jesus has this unique relationship with God, and that His mission is to make God known, to introduce us to the Father, that's what John presents Jesus' mission as. He has this relationship with the Father and He invites His disciples to come to know Him, too. His job is to make the Father known. We get the passage that we have today where Jesus says, "My Father and I will come and make our home with them," or more exactly, "My Father and I will come and menō with them."

This is the final stage of John's usage of that word in the gospel. He's presented Jesus as having this unique, intimate relationship with His Father. Jesus dwells, abides in God, and we are invited to dwell, abide, or stay, too, in that Father. The purpose of Jesus' coming was to draw us into that relationship of love which makes up the Godhead.

The Trinity is not closed. Those persons that make up the Godhead welcome their people into their knowledge of them, into that relationship. The Trinity draws us in. There's an image, a very famous image I've put at the front, the Andrei Rublev image of the Trinity. I've put it there because at this point one starts to run out of words. Language comes to an end and we resort to the imagery of icons to explain this deep and amazing mystery, that God opens Himself up to His people and dwells in them, and as we dwell in God.

In the next chapter after this, chapter 15, the idea continues to be developed with the image of the vine. Jesus says, "I am the vine and you are the branches, those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." Abide is another word, another

translation of that same Greek word *menō*. It comes ten times in chapter 15. We're to *menō* in God as He *menōs* in us.

We've come a long way from that seemingly simple question in chapter 1. "Jesus, where are you staying?" We've seen how John answers it in the whole gospel. He takes the whole gospel to answer the question, and the possibilities the answering of that question opens up for us and for all believers.

At that great mystical point, as I say, "We've run out of words," so I'll leave that image at the front and invite you as you come to communion to look at it, to see the openness there, to ask ourselves, "Do we know what it means to dwell in God, to have Him dwelling in us," because that's the invitation that's set out throughout the gospel of John. Amen.

