

Grace To you and Peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen

When I was in my freshman year of college here at Penn State, I had a faith crisis. I wanted to believe in Jesus like my parents and my Sunday school teachers and pastors had taught me. However, with some new things I was learning in a Philosophy class – and being in college and stretching my wings a little – I was having a hard time accepting my faith. I wondered away from Jesus. I was very uncomfortable not being sure of those tried and true beliefs, but this time of trial for me lasted for about a year. I wanted to believe, but it was difficult for me. I was lost and trying to find my way. Well, one summer evening I came home early and my parents – good Christian people – were watching a Billy Graham crusade on television. Well, even through I was having a hard time believing at that point, I sat down and listened. Billy was pure Billy that night and those of you, who have heard him preach, know that he always ended his sermons with a challenge.

Well that night he was talking about Jesus being the light of the world and he ended by saying – “Don’t let the light of Christ go out on you before it is too late.” Well that was a **great** thing to hear! So I got more depressed and went to bed. As I lay in bed – thinking – well God, If you are there, don’t let your light go out on me”. And as I said that, the little ceramic owl night light in our hallway that my mother turned on every night after dinner – it was on – and all of a sudden as I said “Oh God, don’t let your light go out on me.” – The light in the owl went out! total darkness in my room – Oh my gosh – what was this? However, being the rational and logical college student that I was – I said – well – the light just burned out. But it made me uncomfortable enough to go and put a new bulb in. So I went back to bed – and finally went to sleep – with the night light on, but God wasn’t finished yet. I got awake in the middle of the night and again went over in my mind what had happened, and I said again, “Oh God, I don’t believe much in you right now, but if you are there don’t let the light go out on me before it is too late”. And bam – The light in the owl went out again – I ‘m not kidding – it went out again! Coincidence? I don’t think so – not two times in a night. I didn’t sleep the rest of the night – **now truly believing in God – no doubts now** – I know he was there but convinced the light was out on me and I was doomed. It was too late for me. I was now paying for wondering away for being lost. Well – the next morning was a Saturday; and a miserable Saturday it was. I spent it thinking, despairing, and crying. It was terrible to believe in God and think He didn’t love me. He didn’t have a place for me.

After a sleepless Saturday night, Sunday morning came. Even though I thought I was bound for Hell, God had my attention and I decided to go to church. It can’t hurt, right? Well, I got through the opening hymn and liturgy and when the pastor read the Gospel, it was the story of the sheep and goats. Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep will go to heaven and the goats to unquenchable fire – with weeping –and gnashing of teeth; remember that text from Matthew? Well, I heard that and sunk lower in the pew and in my life. God was really

laying it on me. I was a goat and he was rubbing my face in it. Oh how lost I was. Then the young pastor began his sermon and the first thing he said was – and I was all ears – do any of you think you are a goat? Then he went on, well, you are not. No one here is a goat. Everyone here is a child of God; everyone here is one of God’s sheep, one of his flock, and he went on. God loves you and this passage is a warning – not a condemnation but a warning – Jesus loves you – you are his – And, He will never leave you – And, I know God was speaking directly to me. At that moment I **knew** God loved me. I knew he found me. I was lost and that was terrible, lonely and frightened. During that 54-hour time span, I had no place to be where I could feel safe. I was lost. However, being found is wonderful! God found me; having a safe place to be; God telling me I would always have a place with him was the best feeling in the world.

In our Gospel lesson today – Jesus is promising his disciples and all of us a place. There will always be a place for us. Here on earth we have a place. In fact, he gives us a number of places. He gives us this body – flesh, and blood, and bones – a physical place to house while here. He gives us family and friends, a place of emotional comfort and support while here; and he gives us His church. **His body here** on earth of which you and I are a part – the place that gathers us in, feeds us and sends us out to do his work.

So, Jesus is here! Present with us now – providing a place for you, guiding, directing, and walking with you – as you live your life here on earth.

I know sometimes it doesn’t seem so. Life can be very cruel and hard. I have sat with you during so many hardships – you just retire and suddenly become ill; someone you love gets Alzheimer’s and they don’t know you anymore. The spouse you have been loyal to for 30 years tells you love is no longer needed and they have decided to be with someone else; that test revealed you have cancer; your teenage daughter is caught with illegal drugs; and the love of your life for the last 60 years has died. And we cry out in pain – and wonder where God is? But, believe me, he is here – in the places he promised. The bread and wine of Holy Communion, the waters of baptism, the Bible, Prayer – in the face of a friend who cares and is there for you. You have a place **here** with Jesus – right now. And when those we love die, or when your turn comes to die, please hear this truth again about the place God is **preparing** for you. “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places. If it were not so – I told you that I go and prepare a **place** for you – that where I am you may be also.” He promises that when the places that have habitually provided you with comfort and the abundant life here on this earth can’t do it anymore for you for whatever reasons, then he has the means to make you a **new place** in Heaven where you will be with him forever, again living life abundantly. Jesus **always** has a place for you. He is out in front of you now – paving the way – making your places here on earth secure and preparing your place with him in Heaven forever.

And, remember when you pray for anything in Jesus name – meaning when you pray for things within His will – things he agrees with, they will happen. “Do not let your hearts be troubled” – says Jesus. How can that be reality in today’s world? It can be a reality when your trust is in Jesus. Faith and trust is a gift – and God surely changed my life and gave me my faith back

long ago one summer night back in 1973. We can't **make** faith and trust in Jesus on our own, but there are certainly things we can do to nurture and nourish the faith **Jesus gives us:** Worship, bible study, service to others, and prayers. Asking God to come to you in some way to strengthen and bolster your faith and trust. For me, it was God coming to me during a time of doubt and using a little ceramic owl night light to bring me back – back to my **place** with him.

Well, do you feel lost or forsaken this morning? Jesus loves you. He wants your heart to be at peace. He has a place for you and it is right here next to him. And if you feel lost or out of place, ask him to bring you back to your place with Him. The place he established for you in baptism; your place at the rail where he feeds you; the place he keeps for you every day; places of worship and prayer and service; and Bible study and your Christian family. There you will feel at home. That's your place and he goes ahead to create that new place for you in Heaven with him forever.

Jesus – your way – your truth – your life – your place – **Now and Forever.**

Amen