## 1 Peter 2:2-10

2Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— 3if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and 5like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6For it stands in scripture: “See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” 7To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,” 8and “A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 9But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**John 14:1-14**

*1* "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe [F116](http://www.biblestudytools.net/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?passage=joh+14&version=nrs&showtools=0#F116) in God, believe also in me. *2* In 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? [F117](http://www.biblestudytools.net/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?passage=joh+14&version=nrs&showtools=0#F117) *3* And 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.

*4* And you know the way to the place where I am going." *5* Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" *6* Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. *7* If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." *8* Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." *9* Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father'? *10* Do you not believe that I am 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. *11* Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

*12* Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. *13* I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. *14* If in my name you ask me [F120](http://www.biblestudytools.net/OnlineStudyBible/bible.cgi?passage=joh+14&version=nrs&showtools=0#F120) for anything, I will do it.

“A House with Many Rooms”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

In life, we all have some small and some large regrets. A small one of mine is that in 1998, while attending a summer seminar in San Jose, California, I did not take time to visit the Winchester Mystery House, now a museum. I’ll quote for you part of a description of this phenomenal building.

“This huge 160 room mansion was [home](http://www.associatedcontent.com/theme/1349/home.html) to the heir of the Winchester rifle company, Sarah Winchester, who was told by a psychic to keep building this [home](http://www.associatedcontent.com/theme/1349/home.html) to keep the evil [spirits](http://www.associatedcontent.com/theme/644/spirits.html) away. [An aside here: these spirits were purportedly those of the many victims of death by the rifles built by her husband.]

Sarah Winchester would begin adding on to this mansion and would continue to do so for 38 years until her death in 1922. There was always some type of building going on in the mansion, all hours of the day during these years. This mansion [cost](http://www.associatedcontent.com/theme/1547/cost.html) a whopping 5.5 million dollars and that is in terms of the value of [money](http://www.associatedcontent.com/theme/1358/money.html) back in the 1920's. One can only imagine what it would [cost](http://www.associatedcontent.com/theme/1547/cost.html) to build a mansion like this today.”

Not having seen the house myself, I can only say that it is very, very strange from its pictures. There are staircases that lead nowhere. There are doors that open upon walls. Then, there are the rooms . . . and the rooms, and the rooms.

One scholar has written about the use of the word “mansions,” or “rooms” in the translation of this passage from John, “In light of the ancient Greek, "**mansions**" is better translated "dwelling places." The noun *mone* (connected to the verb *meno*, "stay" or "remain") means "a place to stay." But in light of God’s character, it is better to translate it **mansions**. Whatever dwelling place God has for us in heaven, John Gill says it will be as glorious as a mansion.”

I don’t claim to know what the mansion or dwelling place looks like that God has in store for us as believers. Somehow, though, I have a sense that in anticipation of it, the Winchester mansion might be a good image to keep in mind. To whatever God has in mind, we add rooms of our own device.

My oldest brother converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity in 1985 and shared with me a joke, these many decades after his initial new-convert fervor. I don’t often tell jokes as part of sermons and hope you’ll forgive me this one, though it *is* pretty funny and in keeping with today’s theme. He shared with me how a man who has died arrives at the proverbial pearly gates of heaven, and meets, of course, “St. Peter,” who supposedly is the gatekeeper of sorts. Peter welcomes the man, who is delighted with everything he sees. With excitement and joy, he exclaims, “I have never seen such beauty! The landscape is gorgeous, the weather ideal, and the people are so obviously happy. I’ve never heard such beautiful singing, such harmony and group participation! Wow! This really is heaven!”

The man went on to say, “there is one thing I don’t understand, though. I notice a group of people that are separated from the others, behind a wall. Why is that?” “Well,” said St. Peter, “Those are the Orthodox. It wouldn’t be heaven for them if they thought anyone else were here.”

Whose particularity is this? Yes, there is particularity in Christianity, and it has led some persons to an exclusivism that allows there is no good in creation apart from Christ and Christ’s believers. I believe this is dangerous ground, and yet is something that I have struggled with personally for a very long time. I believe that Christ is God, incarnate on Earth, and I believe that there is salvation through him. I define salvation as eternal life, in communion with God and Christ and all believers in the hereafter. Yet, I have struggled with verse 6 for much of my life, because of wanting God’s grace to be more expansive, especially because of having known and loved persons of other faiths since I was a very little girl. I have struggled with what is my own fairly orthodox theology (with a small o) and the idea of eternal damnation for those who do not believe in Christ. Yet, I am orthodox enough to struggle with what is a common idea in discussions of other religions, that pluralism means saying that all paths to God are essentially the same in their outcome, if not their practice.

In a review of a book called *Many Mansions,* which is about Christianity in view of other world religions, Carl E. Braaten of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, writes, “Harvey Cox recommends that Christians begin with what is of utmost personal passionate interest to them. That is never something abstract and conceptual, but rather their experience of faith in Jesus Christ. [Cox] says, ‘After all, Jesus is in some ways the *most* particularistic element of Christianity.’ There is, of course, a kind of particularism from which Cox would clearly distance himself, and so would I, and that’s the fanaticism that tries to ram Jesus down the throats of other people. But such fanaticism does not necessarily accompany particularism. In fact, people of other faiths want to hear about Jesus, who is much more interesting than some abstract belief in a super-essential something or other beyond all predications. Cox says that from his experience—and he has had a lot of it—the Jesus factor is surprisingly just what the non-Christian participants in dialogue are most interested in and most eager to talk about.”

So, the difficulty remains how we remain constant in our understanding that Jesus Christ is *the way, the truth and the life*, yet value the religions and traditions of other persons and cultures. When I arrived at Andover Newton Theological School in June of 2002, I still had these questions, and while, since then, I have certainly deepened my faith and my conviction in what we know of Jesus from the Gospels, I continue to ponder this question. In meeting Professor Mark Heim, who became my academic advisor, mentor and friend, and in reading several of his books, I began to feel comfortable in addressing *one* answer to this question. It is an answer that allows for the particularity of our claims about salvation through Jesus Christ alone, yet grants that God is present everywhere, all the time. I would add that God is manifest particularly when peoples are worshipping—everywhere, all the time.

There is but one God. That is a very simple statement on one level, but is very complicated when we consider the many world religions. However, Mark Heim argues in his texts, perhaps there is more than one salvation; more than one religious end that holds saving power for persons of other faiths. Goodness knows, a Hindu does not seek eternal life in communion with God and Christ in the hereafter, along with those who profess their faith in Jesus. That is my idea of heaven. A Buddhist, however, does not seek communion with others, but seeks what is typically referred to as “emptiness,” and even “absolute nothingness” as a way of describing nirvana. Surely a Buddhist’s idea of heaven is not communion with Christ, and surely, not professing belief in Christ, a Buddhist will not attain salvation in the way Jesus describes in John 14. Not having known Jesus Christ, a person does not know the father in this way.

I say this without apology far more easily in the past several years, because in saying so, I do not suggest what is often intimated in such a statement; the necessary counterpart to a person’s not believing in Christ may not be the eternal damnation that is so often pounded home as true. What I can say with certainty is that I believe Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, was and is God, and is present with us through the Holy Spirit. I say this with certainty because I read it in scripture, and because through this understanding I know God’s love. I can also say with certainty that I simply do not know what is to come. I read the scriptures trying to understand what *will be*, but I know that I see through that particular future glass only darkly. Only God knows what is in store for us, though we get a foretaste of that glory through communion—in the bread and the cup, and in unity with other persons. So, striving for unity, we should strive for respectful dialogue—not downplaying our own particular faith, but also not denigrating any other’s faith. If living out a religious belief causes someone to live in communion with other persons in a loving, respectful, charitable way, then we should do our best to love that person well and respectfully. This does not mean that we will meet them in the hereafter, but we certainly can meet them in the now. Let the building of God’s mansion, or dwelling place rest in God’s hands. God is, after all, the master builder whose cornerstone is one on which I rest my trust.

When we do build—build our relationships, build our conversations around religion—we might keep in mind a kind of neat image that I have been seeing in my mind’s eye this week. There are a lot of names for the simple game of building and then tearing down a stackable tower of small blocks. I have one called Jengo. Maybe some of you have had it, too. With the blocks in threes, crisscrossed up the height of it, it is possible to remove nearly any block as long as the balance is maintained. For us, as Christians, the one block that always needs to remain in Jesus, because it is through Jesus that we know his father, our Creator God. We *are* invited into a *unique* relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God! Amen.