

## **“Location, Location, Location”**

**Mark 14:22-25**

October 2, 2022

**Mark 14:22-25:** *“While they were eating, He took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it He broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is My body.’ Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks He gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, ‘This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’”*

Location! Location! Location!

That’s the old real estate axiom we all know so well. It’s the reason roughly approximate houses sell for vastly different amounts. Real estate agents know this rule so they’re always pitching the value of their particular location to potential buyers. Natalie and I for years watched this show on HGTV called, House Hunters. It never ceased to amaze me just how little house you could buy in those large metropolitan areas like New York or San Francisco. It just went to prove the adage, location, location, location!

What makes one place any more valuable than another I wonder? Have you ever thought about that? Sure, some spots are closer to work or come with great views but does that truly make them more valuable?

Chances are the reason people shell out so much more for location isn’t really for ease of commute or proximity to beaches. It’s something deeper, I think. I think the reason “location, location, location” is the ultimate rule of real estate is there are just some places where you imagine yourself being happier, just in being there. As in if I can just live in New York City or Figure 8 Island or even Myers Park, then somehow, in some odd, inexplicable way, I won’t just be me...I’ll be a better version of me.

It doesn’t always work out, does it? Most of the time we arrive at wherever it is we assumed would make us different only to discover it’s just the same ole’ us just in another place. If we move to the beach, we’ll get a deeper tan but we won’t really be changed. Perhaps if we move to the big city, we’ll get a taste for Laotian food which’d be hard to come by elsewhere, but we won’t be appreciably better for it. Every once in a while, though, it works though. You get to a new location and you are different. Better even. It does, I promise you. But I think it only happens when you get *to the right place*...the place God wants you to be.

I spent the better part of 25 years living in Southeast Charlotte North Carolina. When the Lord called me into His ministry, I was excited to be located in Mount Holly, right on Charlotte’s border. If you’d asked me the first day of my job here what the best thing about the church was other than the wonderful people, I’d likely have said, that the best thing was its location. I would’ve told you that living in Mount Holly/Shuffletown area is just like living in Charlotte and I liked Charlotte. My opinion would change over time.

I think those of us who’ve lived in both places would agree that even though they’re close to one another, the two towns couldn’t be more different. Charlotte is a sprawling metropolis, Mount Holly/Shuffletown, on the other hand, still exudes a small-town charm and a far less frenetic pace. One of the great things about Cook’s is that it is like a little part of Shuffletown still exists right here at this church. Y’all I don’t think I realized how my outlook had changed until recently. After over a decade of living here in Mount Holly, I found myself back in Southeast Charlotte one afternoon last week and was amazed by what I felt. I felt completely out of place. Like I was a stranger there. *Truth be told, I didn’t like Southeast Charlotte half as much as I once did. I wanted to be back home, back here in Mount Holly/Shuffletown.* Sure, there are some things here that didn’t make sense to me to begin with. There’s the man who rides his lawnmower, twice a day up and down Tuckaseegee Road. God bless Mr. John Deer and his neon orange caution sign. Goodness knows where he’s going but, I promise you this, he’s going to go there every single day. He’s constant, just like the tides.

When I got here, I had to get used to shopping at the Food Lion instead of the Harris-Teeter. I learned to prefer the taste of a Johnny Bruscos’ pizza far beyond pies from the Mellow Mushroom. Instead of the Charlotte farmer’s market, bustling with strangers and noise, I go to our own, a more personal place where I know the names of most of the folks. Heck, I even got to judge cornbread a few years ago.

And you know what, *once you really get to the right location, it claims you as its own.* And in the end, it alters you... it changes you for the better. It makes you miss it like the dickens when you're gone and makes you thankful to God for getting you back there when you've returned from a trip away. It really is all about location, location, location... *but only when it's the right location.*

Today, even though most of us won't even leave our pews, we'll arrive at the best spot in all the world. The bread will be broken, the juice will be poured. The elements passed on those sparkling silver platters the Worship Committee's kept polished through their recent hiatus. It won't feel like we've moved at all...and yet we have. We've arrived at the banquet table of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We come to this table and the feast provided is shared with us freely out of God's Amazing and inexplicable Grace. We're invited to come to this table not because we've earned it, but only because we need it. And, believe me, it's the best deal in town. You come hungry and you're just given the most nourishing food in the entire world. Spiritual food. Grace in the form of bread and juice. And we aren't left to eat alone. We come with others, also needy, also hungry. This isn't a solo feast. I wonder sometimes if there's anything more temporarily depressing than eating alone. I've quaffed down entire meals in my car because I didn't want to eat at a restaurant all by myself. It's like you're in a bubble. You see other people but you can't look at them, not for long at least. You overhear their conversations but can't engage in them. It's a detached feeling, isn't it? Like the world around you is just passing you by, unaware of your existence.

So, thanks be to God we arrive at the Lord's Table with our fellow congregants from the Cook's Memorial Presbyterian Church as well as our visitors. You may be visiting today but guess what? In Christ, you're already part of the family. And what a wonderful family it is., especially as this church gathers for Homecoming! Sitting near you is Johnnie Quinn, as kind a lady as you'll ever meet. Perhaps sitting next to you at the Table is Jeannie McClure, as friendly and dedicated a woman as you'd ever want to know. Look around. The names are different but, no matter what, you're surrounded by your brothers and sisters in Christ, the finest people in all the world.

But that isn't all of the guests here with us, not in the least. We dine this morning at the Lord's Table and we eat with all the elect across the globe and across the ages. With us in the Spirit is that dear friend of yours, the sitting elder at the Belmont church or the great neighbor you still miss every day since they moved to Ohio a year ago. As we talked about in the children's sermon, today we celebrate with brothers and sisters in Christ as far away as Africa and beyond. With us at the feast is Jolly Old Martin Luther, always a joker, faintly smelling of beer and pipe smoke. Across from him sits John Calvin, a little more serious looking in his Geneva robe and pointy beard but joyful nonetheless. Down from them sit Augustine and Irenaeus, St. Paul and St. John. At the Table with you is your mother, long since departed from the earth but with us here in the Spirit at the banquet of the Lord. On the other side of you is your favorite uncle, you know, the one who told you jokes that made you laugh so hard you nearly cried every Thanksgiving and Christmas and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Sitting at the head of our joyous table is Jesus Christ. The one who knows you. And I don't mean knows you like a close friend or even like a spouse. He knows you even better than that. Scriptures reveal that the one who hosts our table has known you since before you were born and He'll be the one tending to you, loving you, throughout all eternity. He's here with us by the power of the Holy Spirit. And guess what? He's thought of everything we're ever going to need and placed them right there, on His table. Jesus has provided the most nourishing meal – the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

And once we're all assembled, as the bread is consumed and the juice is drunk, we'll be in the best location we'll ever be this side of the hereafter. And you know what, even if it all passes by just too darned quickly, just being here will change you. It'll shape you and mold you into the person God wants you to be.

While I was in Pittsburgh, Rev. Craig Barnes shared with us the story of his brother. His name was Robert, and he wasn't a biological brother. He was adopted. You see Rev. Barnes' father was a Baptist pastor in the late 1950's. As a pastor, his father had an absolute passion for finding the lost sheep out there. His congregation had within its pews a host of former drug addicts and alcoholics that had been shepherded into the fold by the senior Rev. Barnes. One of the families arrived with a little boy named Robert. Both the mother

and the father were fighting a heroin addiction but had been clean for several months when they appeared in the pews. Robert played with the Barnes boys every Sunday after church as his father would offer spiritual guidance to this troubled young couple. On one particular Sunday, the family was entirely absent after having been there consistently for several months. Even though they had problems, that family was faithful and for them not to be there was a bit troubling. But after church, the Barnes family went home. Everything was pretty much routine until the phone rang. On the phone was a local policeman. "Rev. Barnes, could you come over to the Jones house?" Next thing you know, Rev. Barnes arrived at the house to discover that both parents had died of a heroin overdose. Robert was there, all alone and visibly shaken. The police officer had asked the boy whom to call and, perhaps just out of instinct, he said to call Rev. Barnes, family pastor. Craig said he imagines his father had already made a decision by the time Robert got into the family's 55 Chevy that night. Craig said he never asked, but he always hoped his dad had stopped somewhere along the way at a pay phone to call him mom to let her know what was coming. You see, Rev. Barnes brought Robert into the house and immediately told his wife and his two boys to come to the living room. "Meet your new brother," he said to the boys. And so it was. But you see, growing up in a family like Robert had, there were a lot of things, etiquette and otherwise, that he hadn't learned along the way. To say the least, he was rough around the edges from spending those years with addicted parents. So, each and every night, coming to the Barnes family table to eat also came with instructions and praise for the young boy. "There, there Robert, we don't do that at the table. We eat with our forks, not our fingers." "How very kind of you Robert, yes, I would like some more green beans." "Now now, let's sit up straight, napkins our laps." "Robert, I heard you made all A's for the first time...we're so pleased with you!" "Well, Robert, we pray because we need to give thanks to God for his blessings to us."

Now you see, coming to the table each night for dinner didn't depend on how he'd behaved the rest of the day or even the night before. *Robert came to eat regardless of all that simply because he was part of the family.* He was loved and cherished and fed for absolutely no other reason than that. But there, sitting with that family, hearing both praise and admonition, he became the young man God wanted him to be. Gracious, Kind, Giving. And he learned it all at the family dinner table.

Friends, this morning we dine with our family at the Table of the Lord. We arrive here not because we deserve it but simply because we're loved. We eat only because we've been made hungry for God's grace. Here, we find ourselves being changed, shaped, molded for the better. Here, as we sit at the Lord's Table we see, it really is all about Location! Location! Location!

And you know what? Right now, ours just couldn't be any better  
In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.