

God is our dwelling place in all generations. The Psalmist promises life in God's steadfast love here and now. According to John, Jesus extends that vision to the eternity of God's grace and love beyond our last breath. "In God's house, there's room enough for all," Jesus says. "I go to prepare a place for you."

Michael does the preparing on the Good Place TV comedy. The world he creates continues life at best for each person. Eleanor arrives. Michael takes her to a simple, one-big-room custom home. She meets her perfect soul-mate Chidi. It's all great. Except none of it fits—who she really was. There's a town welcome party at the home of Jianyu, a silent Buddhist monk and Tahani a British-Southeast Asian woman who speaks incessantly, often lauding gala benefits she hosted with the rich and famous. Eleanor fumes, jealous of their gold-leaf mansion with 36 grass tennis courts. She starts acting true to character—gorging on huge shrimp and wine, calling Tahani a giraffe. It's terribly unnerving for Chidi, a compulsive ethics professor. He gets Eleanor home, in bed. She pines: Do you think anyone cared that I died? You're a good man, she affirms, but can't even say Chidi's last name—Onagonye, settling for Ariana Grande. It's a disaster. She wakes next morning to chaos unleashed. Huge flying shrimp attack the town. Giraffes run wild. Ariana Grande music blares ... All seemingly caused by Eleanor's behavior the night before.

She yells: I don't belong here! Supposedly she got in with record high points gained in life. She tries to be better, but still gets derailed by deceit. At a grand-opening dinner of the Good Plates restaurant, each person gets served a favorite meal, and tells the backstory. Chidi gets grandma's baked perch in peanut sauce. Eleanor gets an empty plate—her favorite was a hunger strike. Jianyu gets a brick of tofu, except by now we found out he's really a drug-dealing, not-the-brightest-bulb-kind-of-guy who craves jalapeno poppers. And he's about to unload the truth to get what he wants when Eleanor panics for a distraction. She puts her fist through a special cake. And a bottomless sink hole erupts in the middle of all the tables. "You broke the world," Chidi yells. "And that's not a complement!"

It's good, fun comedy. I have much more to watch. And I wonder how themes of virtue, human value, grace will get worked out. My wife, Suzanne, and Chrissy haven't spoiled it! I wonder, because beyond the comedy, it raises questions that I expect have risen and may still reside in our minds and hearts. For me, it raised concerns about attempts we hear to proclaim who gets into the heavenly cool place and who gets condemned to the hot place. Where I am in the show, the whole point system thing has begun to break down. Best I can tell, the Good Place turns worse—Eleanor and others get tormented—as they center on themselves, their needs and desires, their hurts and fears. They get freed from worry, judgment, not-enoughness when they start thinking about and living for others, spreading kindness and goodness. And every character becomes better, Chrissy explained, more humane, fully human, through relationship with others.

We're here on this All Saints Sunday to say we care about loved ones who've died. We're here to affirm all people belong in God's love. We're here to keep living in love and blessed grace we've shared, even when our world seems broken and we're on the edge of falling into a bottomless pit. We aren't perfect. Consequences come from our actions. Still, I don't believe God runs a point system for the Good Place,

like Santa's list of naughty or nice. We find the way, following Jesus, living in service.

We receive an inheritance. That's how early Christians made sense of it. They tried to respond in kind, stewarding that grace, passing it on. Friends, in living faith, we're part of something much bigger than ourselves. Biologically, relationally, spiritually beyond explanation others bring us to life. Gratefully and generously, we reinvest that love—that commitment, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, hope, joy—among family and friends, here in church and throughout our community / world. And through the eyes of faith, we see Sacred Grace in it all.

We know the Holy One immanently—God with us, as we get to know intimately others around us. With eyes of our hearts enlightened—I love that phrase. We see our world, other people, we see beauties and imperfections, we feel gratitude and frustrations all through eyes of the heart enlightened by holy love. God gives us the wise heart the psalmist promises, as we cherish all we've received, nurture hope, trust the great, unbounded potential of God's resurrection power made real in Jesus. It gets emphasized again later in the letter—God's love in us and among us beyond all we can ask or imagine. It must be true good news for us. We receive. We trust. We give. So others live abundantly. That's why Jesus gave his life. That's how he offers his loving presence to all people. That's when we know the Risen Christ alive beyond the tomb, revealed among us—his body, fulfilling the life of God in him.

In Christ, we're destined to embody divine purpose. As a quick aside, you see, that's what talk of predestination tries to get at. No puppet strings dictating our lives, eliminating all decision. It's about being naturally swept up in purposes God desires for us and destines for all creation; our truest nature from before anything we can know.

Yes, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Friends, that's a comfort when we lose a loved one or face our own mortality. A last human breath and sigh is not the end. Not the end of relationship with others. Not the end of goodness created, joy shared, an impact we've had. But what if we feel more like Fake Eleanor than Mother Theresa? Well, the Bible is more chronicle of human failure, than model of perfection. We trust in grace. And that's no calculated equation. It's Love that keeps on flowing however much we fall short, until we respond. I like this Emily Dickinson poem read at Judy's memorial service yesterday:

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto [its] nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

You see, our place on this planet, the reason we're here is not to be perfect in our person. See with eyes of the heart enlightened ... When our voice falls more silent than a Buddhist monk. When we never again eat a favorite meal or sit in a customary chair or pew. When we don't show up to tutor or volunteer, to work or visit. Still we live beyond tombstone dates. We endure together. We remain related. Our breath in our sighs part of the Great Spirit. Our love kindled in the heart of another. Our witness continuing in how others live.

Yes, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. And that's a calling and commitment—more than qualifying for some status after death, it's about a quality of life right here and right now. As we come to know Holy Love and purpose, we keep hope. We give thanks and praise for rich blessings abounding even amid trials and loss. We relieve pressure in expectations that grow unreasonably, often insidiously, to prove personal value and meaning by what we achieve; by what we

can accomplish physically or mentally or not so much anymore. We realize, friends, that in the end, all the dollars in our pocket or bank account, all the knowledge we've learned, all the abilities we've honed, all the resources we have, all that we are and hope to be ... bring the most goodness for us and others, when we offer them to God, for the glory of our community and all creation fully alive.

Yes, we are part of something bigger than ourselves. And that gives us courage, strength, and direction. Especially when it seems we're out of place, we don't belong, our world is broken. What power do we trust above all others? As Eugene Peterson translates Ephesians: "It's in Jesus Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for." It's God's love in Jesus Christ we trust more than any other promise or threat—his way of compassion, the truth

And so, we get up each morning to find goodness amid our sense of less. And so, we take another step in our rehab and recovery, or keep caring for one beloved in such need. And so, we don't give in to cynicism in society, to doomsday despair. We seek ways to help others get a tank of gas and work, resources to live more abundantly. We find a voice to face bias. We find good people, valuable perspectives beyond the partisan barriers and binary polarities in our culture.

Yes, we are part of something bigger than ourselves ... here in this Good Place, this sanctuary in the city. There are many rooms in this home for all. I hope we find a place custom-made for each of us. No grass tennis courts. We have a columbarium ... final home / resting, dwelling place ... a place of comfort in the eternity of life beyond the limits of our first breath and final sigh. A place where we feel our connection from the radiance of Jesus through all other saints across generations, to the illumination we receive for the horizons of our life still ahead.

We have a gathering place ... a place we always share coffee and conversation about realities in our lives. A place where today we give thanks for mission partners we support in our community and beyond. And we celebrate our commitment to serve beyond preserving our own needs and desires. A place we might start and keep acting our truest character our most sacred self, full of compassion, grace.

Soon we'll gather around this table. Here we'll name, we'll remember among us those we've loved and lost and still cherish. We'll find served up on a good plate our favorite meal: the bread of life, the cup of covenant love we share. It's a welcome party, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. It's the joyful feast of God's people. And to get here, to be part of it, there are no points necessary to gain. Come, dear friends, among the company of saints present and past and yet to come. People we love and laugh and serve with as the risen Christ made real. Beloved who have gone on before into life eternal, yet linger in our hearts and minds and the ways of life. Faithful servants who will receive the rich inheritance of Christ among us. Come, dear friends, receive the comfort, renew the commitment, recharge the encouragement we all need for living beyond ourselves.

Thanks be to God. Amen.