



**Rev Helen Jacobi**

**Many rooms**

Year A Easter 5

1 Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

7 May 2023

“There are many rooms in my Father’s house” – this passage is one you might be familiar with from hearing it read at funerals. It is often chosen to reassure the mourners that Jesus has prepared a place for us in heaven. Well today is not my funeral, just my farewell, and it is the reading for the day. I did however choose not to have the reading from the book of Acts today which includes an account of the stoning of Stephen.

Many rooms - Jesus paints a picture of life in God (not necessarily life after death) as an expansive place, with room for all. My first thought on looking at this passage was the spaces within this church. Look up and around at the arches – every way you look in this church there is an arch, and beyond it another arch and another one.

This church in its design invites you to look and to see what might be in the various spaces.

Room for all.

In these rooms, in these spaces, worship is offered: baptisms, weddings, funerals; small intimate services and

big services with standing room only. Quiet reflective services and services with lots of music, like today. These rooms enable us to offer hospitality to the city for gatherings, concerts, fundraisers and events. From the events like the opening of the City Mission Homeground building to a quiet reflective lunch time concert; from a 3 day film shoot to a business breakfast for 10 or 150; from a fundraiser for a charity to a reception for a local business. Vigils after the Christchurch massacre; gatherings on housing, climate change and other political issues. Many rooms.

Our life as a church community does not just happen within these walls.

We find ourselves in many more rooms.

Filming in the vicarage kitchen, lounge and garden to be received in your lounges and dining rooms during the covid lockdowns.

Livestreaming now into rooms across Aotearoa and indeed the world.

And our digital platform serving as a library of content and ready for its next phase of interaction and learning.

And then when we are not gathering each one of you is living out your Christian calling in your homes, offices, workplaces and communities.

Many rooms.

I think of the rooms I have ministered in; hotel rooms to bless the space after someone has died, giving reassurance to hotel workers.

Meeting in offices with business people from Sky City to local shops. Community network meetings, local Board meetings, City Council meetings. Rooms I have been welcome into – marae, mosques and temples.

Media interviews in the church, on the phone and in the studio. From marriage equality to hot cross buns, from Kim Hill to the Jono and Ben show. Home communions and house blessings from Orewa to Pokeno; from Ranui to St Heliers. Many rooms.

And as I step down from ministry here at St Matthew's after 9 amazing years, I am also stepping down from 31 years of fulltime ministry. 31 years of Sundays, nurturing and leading different communities in Wellington, Ottawa, Napier and Auckland. 8 parish communities, some for a short time, others longer.

Lots of different rooms.

In Wadestown in Wellington we built new rooms in a wonderful community space; in Napier we knocked some old rooms down to make space for new opportunities. Here we have added digital rooms and comfortable office space. In every place I have been privileged to spend time in people's lives, at moments of joy and sorrow, and in the every day cycle of worship and community life.

And now I am making space in my life to see what rooms I will next find myself in. The door is open and I don't know what I will find on the other side but I am excited to see what might be there.

You are called to carry on being the hosts in these rooms.

To welcome people Sunday by Sunday and to listen to what the city needs from St Matthew's in this next phase of its life, and as you call your 19th vicar. As the writer of the letter of Peter says "like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house .... God's own people."

This sacred space and the ministry it enables is passed from generation to generation; you are the current guardians, inherited from our founders in 1853.

22 May this month will mark 170 years since the ordination of our first vicar Frederick Thatcher and the establishment of the parish.

Carry our history and heritage with pride and know that what you do will be gladly received as foundations for the next generation.

Continue to claim your role as Aotearoa's leading progressive faith voice.

When you hear Jesus say into today's reading "I am the way, the truth, and the life" – hear it as I am sure it was intended – as a welcoming open invitation to the Jesus way – which is a way that offers room for all; not as many preachers would preach it as exclusive with Jesus being the only way.

Or the way they want to teach so they can have control of the minds of their people.

That is not the Jesus way.

The Jesus way is a house with many rooms, continuing as far as the eye can see.

Rooms of every size and shape for people of every faith and background.

A place for all, a spirited place where people stand, connect and seek common ground.