

MAY 3, 2026

MAKING OUR HOME WITH GOD

By Pr. Beate Chun

The Sealing of a Cell

Grace to you and peace
from the one who is
and the one who was
and the one who is to come.

The mason lifts a stone,
he turns it once in his hands,
and presses it into the narrowing gap.
Mortar squeezes at the edges.
Then another stone,
and another.
He is filling in a gap in a wall,
a task he has done
thousands of times.
But never like this,
never inside a church
while there is a worship service going
on in the background,
and not just any service—
it is the funeral for the dead.

They are singing the service
while he is building the wall,
a wall that will enclose
a lady inside a small cell,
as if she is being buried alive.

Why?

Why is this lady being sealed up
in the cell?

Because she herself has insisted on it.

Over and over,
for months, she had asked for this.
Her soul needed it.

It was God's holy will for her
to be enclosed within a cell
inside the church walls for
the rest of her life.

Finally the church agreed:
yes, she could be enclosed,
and today was the day.
She stepped into the cell,
and the mason began
his work.

All around him was
the smell of incense
and beeswax,
the chanting of the priest,
the funeral mass:

*"Requiem aeternam dona ei,
Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei."*

—Grant her eternal rest, O Lord, and
let perpetual light shine upon her.

And now it was time to place
the final stone.

Afterwards, there would be
no way for the lady to leave
the cell.

She would have three windows, each
opening a different kind of world:

One window into the church,
so that she could hear the Mass,
the chant, the bell at the elevation,
light from candles flickering through the opening.

One window into the street outside,
so that people could come to her
for guidance and counsel.

And one window for her practical needs—
her maid would bring food
and fresh clothing,
and take away waste and dirty laundry.

One final tap,
and it is done.
The mason has closed the cell.

*“In manus tuas, Domine,
commendo spiritum meum.”*
Into your hands, O Lord,
I commend my spirit.

The priest is now singing—
the commendation of the dead.

Then worship comes to an end.
The candles are being extinguished,
one last flicker along the walls,
light catching on worn plaster
and painted saints whose colors have softened with time.
Then the church is dim, and quiet,
the smell of beeswax still lingering.

It is done.

A Life Left Behind

Outside, beyond the thick walls,
the world continues—cart wheels on stone,

distant voices, the ordinary pulse of a living city.

But the lady is no longer
part of this world.
The life she had known up until now
is over.

We do not know
whether it was a pleasant life
or an unpleasant life,
a life that had more joys
than sorrows,
or the other way around.

But we can guess that the lady
had some comforts.
She has a maid,
and she has the resources
to have the cell built and maintained.
Perhaps she even gave
an endowment to the church.

She was highly educated,
familiar with the scriptures
and the theological writings of her day.
She may have corresponded
with scholars near and far.

And then,
at the age of thirty,
she had come close to death.
In that illness, she received a series of visions
of Christ's love.
She recovered. She lived.
She followed that love,
and it brought her to this place—
an enclosed cell
which to all might look like a tomb,

a restricted space,
with nothing but
a narrow bed,
a wooden stool,
a crucifix,
her books and writing materials.

Everything else is gone.

A Hidden Life Begins

But just like a seed
that is buried
deep in the ground,
the lady begins
to flourish in this space.

Her days take on a rhythm.
She wakes in the dim light,
prays the hours,
listens for the sounds of worship
through the small opening into the church.
The bell marks time.
The seasons turn outside, witnessed
partially through one of her three windows.
People seek her out—
neighbors, strangers, those carrying burdens
they cannot hold alone.
She listens. She speaks.
She becomes, quietly, a guide.

There is silence,
and in the silence, attention.
Years pass. Perhaps decades.
But most of all,
she has time for herself
and time to be with God,
and this time turns out

to be extraordinarily fruitful.
She has profound spiritual visions and insights—
insights which still echo through the world.

Visions of Love

She comes to understand God both as Father and Mother,
and she writes:

“As truly as God is our Father,
so truly God is our Mother.”

For the Lady, God was not an angry judge,
but a God of love and compassion.

And in that small space,
she writes—carefully, reflectively—what she has come to understand.
She writes of Christ and his love,
a love that does not withdraw, even in suffering;
of sin not as final failure,
but as something held within a larger mercy.

And from that cell, from that stillness,
comes a sentence that has traveled far beyond its stone walls:

**“All shall be well,
and all shall be well,
and all manner of things shall be well.”**

Not spoken lightly.
Not spoken from ease.
But from within enclosure,
within a wounded world,
within a life given over to prayer and presence.

Julian of Norwich

By now you may have guessed
the name of the lady.
We know her as Julian of Norwich.

Julian lived in the 14th century
in England, in a town called Norwich,
about 160 miles northeast of London.
In her time it was
one of the largest and wealthiest cities in England,
a center of trade, especially textiles.

The town still exists today,
and the church can still be visited—
St Julian's Church.
Although the original church
was heavily damaged during World War II,
it was rebuilt in the 1950s
and still stands as a place of worship and pilgrimage.

Julian's writings were full of hope and joy,
which stood in stark contrast
to the mood of her times.

She lived through
grim and devastating events—
economic suffering, war,
and repeated outbreaks of plague
that wiped out more than half the population.
And yet her visions were all about
God's nearness and goodness.

"All shall be well,
and all shall be well,
and all manner of things shall be well."

At Home with God

In today's gospel from the Gospel of
John, we hear an invitation from Jesus
to come and be at home with God:
"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places."

Some people picture these dwelling places
as a destination for us
to travel to after our death.
I myself picture them right here,
right now.

There are many ways
in this world for us to dwell with God.
We don't need to go to a cell
like Julian of Norwich—
at least I don't think
that is the path for most of us.

Instead, I believe that
being at home with God
is perhaps another way
of being at home with our true self.

There are many things we can do—
simple practices, times of silence—
that allow for a deeper experience
of being at home with God.

After all, Jesus taught that in the house of God
there is a lot of room.
Under the gentle rule of God
there are many dwelling places,
many paths,
many ways to live a spiritual life.

If we love God,
we don't need many rules.
If we love God,
most things will take care of themselves.

Or, as Julian said:
"All shall be well,
and all shall be well,

and all manner of things shall be well.”

A Living Invitation (Conclusion)

The church remembers Julian of Norwich
each year on May 8.

And perhaps that is the invitation for us today—
not to withdraw from the world as she did,
but to find, even here,
a small space within us
where Christ may dwell.

A place of trust.

A place of quiet.

A place where, even in the midst of uncertainty,
we can say with her—slowly, honestly, faithfully:

All shall be well.

Thanks be to God,
who is our haven and our true home.

Amen.

Sermon for Sunday, May 3rd, 2026
5th Sunday of Easter

Presented at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church San Francisco

Text: [John 14:1-14 NRSVue - Jesus the Way to the Father - “Do not - Bible Gateway](#)

Tags: Easter Season | In My Father’s House are many rooms | Julian of Norwich