

Devotion: Tuesday, May 12, 2020

John 14:1-14

Jesus the Way to the Father

14 *'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In 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? ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.'* ⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If 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 for anything, I will do it.

This chapter and verse from John is often quoted as a positive uplifting and at times controversial verse. Remember this all took place at the Last Supper, so it's easy to overlook the apostles fear and confusion. When Jesus says, for instance, as he prepares his disciples for his imminent departure – this is the night before his crucifixion, keep in mind – that “*you know where I am going?*”, Thomas shoots back, “*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*” Perhaps, as is sometimes the case in John, that question serves mainly as the prompt for Jesus' pronouncement about being the way, truth, and life. But it doesn't reduce the down-to-earth and somewhat painful frustration in Thomas' question.

Likewise, Philip's incredible request – keep in mind the long Old Testament tradition of recognizing that mere mortals cannot bear to see God face to face – to “*show us the Father*” indicates a deep desire, even sense of desperation, to have a physical experience of God's presence.

I think, my friends, that it's these words of sadness, absence, longing, and protest that speak most forcibly to us today. Maybe it's because so few of us saw this pandemic coming. Maybe it's because when it did come, few of us imagined we'd be in this for so long. Maybe it's because we have no idea of how long it will last. Maybe it's all the fighting about when we should loosen restrictions and the other arguments being used by opposing sides. Maybe it's because even when things *do* get back to normal, most of us are realizing that the new normal won't resemble the old normal of even this past early March for a long, long time. Maybe.... Well, you get the idea.

Which is why these words of isolation, confusion, and desperation that Philip and Thomas speak to are so important. Because without the “reality check” they introduce, any words of consolation and hope we may offer – even if we repeat Jesus' words of consolation and hope – will likely seem like lies in the ears of anyone who does not live our faith. But if we can give voice to all these other emotions – perhaps the most useful biblical word is “lament” – maybe then we can hear Jesus' words of response for what they are: promises. Promises made by one who is

acquainted with sorrow, confusion, disappointment, and lament. This is, after all, the Word made flesh. That eternal Word of God, who took on our flesh, sharing our life that we might know God not only cares, but also understands.

Biblical lament – most especially in the Psalms but throughout the bible – was crucial in giving voice to all that is difficult to understand and endure so that we could clear the space in which to hear a word from the Lord as authentic and meaningful. The same is true today. We need to acknowledge the pain, the fear, the confusion. But then go on to remind ourselves that this is not the last word, that the difficult emotions are real and and worth giving voice to, but they are not the only reality, they don't overturn all that is good in our lives, and they are not the only words worth voicing.

So once we take Philip's plea in response to Jesus' pronouncement of his impending departure – “*show us the Father!*” – seriously, then and only then can we hear, accept, and begin to understand Jesus' answer – “*if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.*” Because the God Jesus shows us is not unmoved or distant nor hard-hearted, but rather passionately engaged in our life, pledged to our welfare, and committed to bringing us through all things so that we have not just life, but abundant life, in Jesus' name.

And, if we can cry out with Thomas, “*We don't know the way!*” and feel no guilt that such words aren't faithful enough, then and only then we can we trust that Jesus is the way, and that way includes the cross but ultimately leads toward resurrection.

No one says faith makes things easier – and neither the Bible nor history offer even the slightest evidence to such a conclusion. Rather, the life of faith makes things richer and more meaningful. Sometimes that means just getting by. At other times it means growing even in the most challenging of circumstances. But always it means that we do not travel alone, but with the presence of God, the one revealed in the person of Jesus. When the resurrected Jesus meets the disciples in the locked room on Easter evening, after all, he doesn't say that now it's all smooth sailing, or because he has defeated death life will now be a piece of cake. Rather, he breathes on them the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, Comforter, Encourager, and Helper. Why? Because across the rest of their lives and ministries, they're going to *need* – on a pretty regular basis, – advocacy, comfort, encouragement, and help.

We have a long road ahead of us, my friends, and only when we look at that road seriously and honestly – and then make space to give voice to our anxieties about it – can we remember that Jesus has already traveled it and accompanies us upon it now. Because he really is the way, the truth, and the life, the one who leads us to abundant life in and through his Father. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Father, you have commanded us not to worry, yet we confess that we spend so much time doing just that. We confess our lack of trust in you. Help us surrender our fears and concerns to you, knowing that your hand is in every aspect of our lives. Father, turn our hearts toward yours and draw us close to you. We confess our desperate need for you, for on our own we fret and fail. Help us follow you with all our lives. Thank you for your continued patience and forgiveness. We love you. Amen.

Vaya Con Dios,
Pastor Jack