

May 10, 2020

Mother's Day/Festival of the Christian Home/5th Sunday in Easter

Meditation on John 14:1-14 (NSRV) "Now What?"

¹"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." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus 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."

⁸Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus 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'? ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹Believe 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. ¹²Very 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. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY! What a beautiful day to celebrate our mothers. I like you, have been blessed to have several ladies in my life who were not mothers, claim me as their own. So, you don't have to be a biological mother to be a mother. There have been many ladies (married or not) that have been a mother to me who neither bore nor adopted a child. I hesitate to mention them, fearing I might omit one. My dear childless unmarried aunt loved me as her own. In my neighborhood there was a mother of six who welcomed all children into her home. As a young family man, I was blessed by a childless lady and her husband in numerous ways.

I cannot forget my mother who lived for ninety-five years. Some blessed me by saying I resembled her. I pray it will be said that I resemble my Heavenly Parent. As a child, I often thought that she was too strict, as she daily (sometimes more) sent me into the yard to break off a "green switch" and bring it to her to administer corporal punishment. Possibly, in today's societal language, it might have been labeled child-abuse, but those of us who grew up in that era know and believe that it was just good child 'rear-n-din.' Looking back today, I am convinced it worked. A little of it today, might be of use. I sometimes disappointed and other times made my parents proud. What stands out, is that in disappointment, they continued to love, encourage and support me. Jesus was telling his disciples the same thing in John 14 – 'don't worry, hang in there, I love you.'

When my father died, I felt I lost a measure of security. My mother lived twenty-five years beyond my father's death. She remained a connection to my heritage and unknowingly my spiritual tutor. Whenever, I needed to know something about our family, I would ask her and receive family history related through stories. When she finally agreed to give up house-keeping, she moved into an assisted living facility. From there she moved to an apartment attached to my younger sister's home, three and a half hours away. Leaving her community and church, wore hard upon her and after a year and a half, she moved in with Wanda and I, a return to the area she had lived most of her life. She thrived as she was able to be present with more of her friends and family. It was a lot of responsibility, but Wanda treated her as her own mother. Our two years together were a blessing – to all three of us – four including our toy poodle, Theo. Even in her nineties, my mother remained my teacher. She encouraged me in the midst of my first appointment. She went to both of my churches each Sunday. I will never forget seeing and hearing her pray vocally on her knees at her bedside. Her daily devotional time helped reinforce my own. I miss both of my parents, especially my mother. I asked myself, 'what now' – both parents are gone? I can only image what the disciples felt knowing Jesus was returning to the Father.

Today's Gospel lesson has a similar theme of bewilderment. The Gospel of John is quite different from the Synoptic Gospels. It's primarily about the Incarnation. This book is about helping the readers (John's community and us) in our understanding that Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God. Consider the context of this pericope. In Chapter 13 the writer says Jesus and his disciples met before the festival of the Passover for their last meal together. Even though the devil had already put into the heart of Judas the idea of betraying Jesus, he was among those whose feet Jesus washed. During this meal as Judas slips out, Jesus foretold that Peter would deny him three times while Jesus was arrested, tried and scourged.

Again, Jesus prophesized his death and after experiencing what was happening during Holy Week, his disciples were confused and distraught. Chapters 14-16:33 are known as the Farewell Discourse. You are familiar with today's passage as it is often read at funerals, giving comfort to those gathered. Jesus knows his disciples lack understanding and wonder about the future. At this last meal together, Jesus sits and attempts to encourage them. They had been on a three-year journey together and now he is about to leave them – those who have given up everything to follow him. They worry.

Brett Blair tells a story – *I remember a plane ride where the pilot came over the intercom: We have lost one of our engines. No need to worry, we will be arriving 1 hour later than anticipated. Pilot 30 minutes later: We have lost another engine; we will be arriving 2 hours later at our destination.*

Pilot one hour later: We have lost our third engine. We will be arriving 4 hours late at our destination.

Passenger to her husband: I'm starting to get worried, if that last engine goes we will be up here all night.

Jesus says, don't worry. You are going to be alright. You believe in God and also in me. Their relationship with Jesus would continue, no matter what happened. He tells them that there is room in the Father's house for all to dwell – plenty of room for them as well. The root meaning of “dwelling” relates to a ‘resting place,’ an abiding relationship with him and the Father. His preparing constitutes the propitiation of sins and intercession for them and us with the Father. Jesus is reconciling the sinful human with God – allowing their relationship to grow.

Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis says, this discourse *“describes not resurrected life, but ascended life with God.”* He assures them that in the days ahead, he will ascend to the Father. Jesus tells them after he has prepared the way for a relationship between humans and the Father, he will come and take (make available to them entry) them to the Father. Then, they will have direct access to the Godhead through him. Jesus tells them they know where he is going and they know the way. Professor Jaime Clark-Soles interprets Thomas' response to Jesus statement something like: *“We have no idea what you're talking about, first of all, and second of all, upon what basis should we have known?”*

Over the years many of us have read verse six in a particularly exclusive way. If you know my preaching, I always like to throw something at you that makes you sit up, think and question. I want you to question what I say and do some studying on your own. This is a verse that has and continues to be interpreted in various ways. Some “mean-spirited” individuals use it very dogmatically. Hear it in a different light. Jesus' promise is often turned into exclusivity. Rev. Dr. James Howell says, *“Consider the setting – he is not in a classroom. He is with his closest friends, his disciples at their last supper together before the crucifixion. He's trying to give his disciples hope. We don't know the tone/intonation of the passage. Did he say I am THE way, I am THE truth, I am THE life... Was Jesus closing people out? Jesus was good at including”* them consistently.

“The Way” Jesus is talking about has to do with relationship. Brainwaves from workingpreacher.com states, *“Beware of exclusivity. It is a response to Thomas' question. The way is not geographical. The way is not expediency. The way is relationship. A promise of the abiding relationship with Jesus. It's about particularity not exclusivity.”* Even though Jesus is going away, their relationship with Jesus is not. This promise to his disciples is invitational.

This ‘way’ Jesus is talking about is revealed in the life of Jesus. It is not a roadmap. The ‘way’ is living the life Jesus taught, remembering those he healed, ate with and cared for. It is about forgiveness and sharing. It's about spreading the good news of life eternal. Jesus is the revelation of God's character. If you want to know what God is like, read about Jesus. Jesus is the heart of God, a loving and caring relationship with the Divine and our fellow human beings.

Even Philip gets in on the conversation. He's from the “show me state.” I'm sure there's a little bit of irritation here with Philip. These disciples have traveled with him for three years

and they still don't get it! Jesus sums his life, *"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."* As we read in Genesis, God has always wanted to dwell among his creation and creatures and Revelation says it will happen.

Verses twelve through fourteen challenge our motives. We think that if we use a specific formula in our prayers and pray in Jesus' name, all will be fulfilled. We're also told that we will do greater things than those mentioned in this text. Perhaps, Prof. Elisabeth Johnson says, we are reading this verse wrongly by *"expect(ing) to do these greater works in the same way that Jesus did them – with miraculous power that instantly solves the problem at hand. Yet even miracles are not guaranteed to produce faith."* We need to look around and see all that has happened in our life time – evolving communication, the ridding of diseases, feeding of the hungry, new ways of spreading the gospel, discovering of new vaccines, caring for the destitute. God is at work in this world through humans, all created in the image of God. In the midst of this pandemic we see things happening that surprise all of us. We continue to care for the infirm, our neighbors and family members. Families are spending quality time together. We are rediscovering our creativity. It's sort of like the stock market has in the past and is doing now. It is readjusting and discovering its true worth.

We're living in a liminal time. We are between the known and the unknown. According to Rev. Carl Ripley, *"the Latin word 'limen' means 'threshold.' Liminality is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where people can begin to think and act in genuinely new ways. It is when we are betwixt and between, have left one room, but have not yet entered the next room, any hiatus between stages of life, stages of faith, jobs, loves, or relationships. It is that graced time when we are not certain or in control, when something genuinely new can happen. We are empty, receptive, an erased tablet waiting for new words."* It a "What Now" time.

Just as when we lose someone that is dear to us, we ask, what now. To whom am I to turn for comfort and trust. This Mother's Day reminds me that I can no longer talk to my mother, when I need a question answered on family history. It's a time when I can no longer seek security from my deceased father. It is a time that I need to reevaluate my way of living and what voice I follow.

Jesus was concerned about his family and disciples he was about to leave behind. They needed comforting. They needed reassurance and encouragement. That is what Jesus is doing in John 14:1-14. He's reassuring them that where he is going they will also go one day, and yet can receive the benefit now. There is plenty of room for a relationship with God.

Halford Luccock once told of a group of people having dinner together. One of the party was just back from a vacation in Maine. He told his friends a poignant story of a little village in the hills which was doomed shortly to extinction. The state was building a power dam on the river and had bought up the surrounding property so that with the completion of the dam in a year or so, the village would be flooded by a large lake. The effect on the little village was devastating. Everything suddenly came to a standstill. All building of course stopped, all

improvement and repair ceased. What was the use of painting a house if, in a year or so, it would be covered with water? Why repair or replace anything when the whole village was doomed to extinction? So, month by month the town became more and more dilapidated, bedraggled, and forlorn, taking on the aspect of a ghost town. Commenting on this, the man said, "Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present." So, it is with Christian Hope.

Jesus gives us the 'Christian Hope' that he gave his disciples. This pandemic will not last forever. *"Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present."* Brothers and sisters, have faith in the future because Jesus say in the *Common English Bible*, John 14:1 *"Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.* So, what now? Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. That's 'what's now.' Trust in God. Amen.