

Rev. Eric Dillenbeck
John 14:1-14
“Asking the Questions”
May, 7, 2023 – Year A

Gospel Lesson

John 14:1-14

NRSV

“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.” 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.

This the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

“Asking the Questions”

The past four weeks have been a whirlwind. After spending two weeks training a new team of seasonal staff, the team at Youth Opportunities Unlimited began our intake process. We usually see about 40-50% of families attend their appointment. This year we are seeing almost 70% attendance rate. This means our team has been busy from when the doors open straight through to completing the very last appointment of the night.

So far, we are 80% of our way to our enrollment goal of 1350 young people. To keep the team motivated and upbeat we provide a lot of their favorites snacks, but we also have team huddles where we share our “Highs, Lows, and Buffaloes” – The highs are what we saw that was great today, our lows tend to be reminders and pointers for process improvements and the Buffaloes are just comic relief to get the group laughing and relaxing – which usually involves me hitting the 30-second dance party button for a team dance break.

At the end of every shift, we talk briefly about the next day to make sure everyone is prepared to show up at the right place. You see, part of our strategy to engage with families is to move our intake locations around the county. So, we announce the location, remind everyone of the address, and remind everyone about parking at that location. As everyone is leaving the Program Leaders are then stuck there for an extra 15 minutes because a few people then ask, “Where are we going?” “How do I get there” Where do I park when I get there”

I try not to get irritated at questions like this, because I have learned that these questions are invitations to make connections. I believe Jesus, especially in the interactions depicted in the Gospel of John, used a similar technique. Throughout John’s gospel we see the disciples asking the witless questions that are probably on everyone’s minds – here it is Thomas and Philip asking the questions that we all probably needed to ask in this pretty dense passage.

The creators of our lectionary cycle have jumped back in the narrative timeline – back to chapter 14, back to before Jesus has been crucified and resurrected.

Why? You ask?

We are moving towards Pentecost Sunday when Jesus will leave the disciples until he comes again. The disciples will have to become the bearers of the story in the world. **We** have to become bearers of the story in the world and so, we jump back to be reminded of Jesus’ words to the disciples at a time when he was preparing them for his absence.

Jesus has announced that he is going to be leaving them. These words fell like a lead balloon as did the faces of the gathered disciples. Jesus could read the room though and meets their dismay with reassurance – with words we so often hear at memorial services - “*Do not let your hearts be troubled.*”

Where I am going, there is ROOM for you, there will **always** be room for you because where I am, you will be also.

“And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

Queue Thomas and his question.

“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

This next part which is one of the most famous passages in scripture, carries a lot of baggage in the church.

⁶*Jesus said to him,
“**I Am** the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.*

For too long this has been the center piece for the Christian exclusivity movement – for the argument that it is ONLY through Christ that people know God. For those whose lives are shaped by this mindset, I believe they are missing a bigger message in this text, but before we look for that, I would

mention that those claims of Christ alone actually diminish the power and expansiveness of God – it limits the belief that God can and does act in the world in whatever ways are necessary to connect with Creation.

Thomas' question to Jesus is like my team's questions – how do we literally get to this place you are going?

Jesus' response is something else.

“Thomas asks Jesus how they will know ‘the way.’ In Greek the term *hodos* is the word for way, road, or highway. While the term can serve as an understanding for an actual road or way, *hodos* can also mean a journey or a trip. However, there is also a connotation that serves **metaphorical** purposes. *Hodos* can also represent the ‘way’ or the ‘way of life’ that connotes behavior. In Acts of the Apostles, the first Jesus-followers called themselves ‘people of the way’ (Acts 9:2). In the times prior to the writing of the Gospel of John, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle thought of the philosophical systems as methodical *hodos*. Jesus is teaching in the same vein as these philosophers. **Philip is asking the question in a literal highway sense, but Jesus is answering metaphorically¹.**”

How do we get to the place where Jesus is with God? By living the way Christ lived – by showing mercy, by loving kindness, by offering forgiveness, by feeding the poor, clothing the naked, by showing forth the goodness and mercy of God made known in Jesus Christ.

Christians have spent so much time viewing this passage as a claim to exclusivity that we have missed the invitation and expectation that When we live by the WAY of Jesus – the way of community and connection - we find abundant LIFE and discover the TRUTH that by giving abundantly we are drawn closer into the heart of God who has created a place for us.

Let us be a people of the way – let us show forth the goodness and mercy of Christ that friends and neighbors and strangers may come to know of Christ' love for them each and every day and be drawn to grow in their own faith life by learn the way of Christ for themselves.

Amen

¹ Angela N. Parker - Assistant Professor of New Testament and Greek, McAfee School of Theology - Mercer University, Atlanta, Georgia
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-john-141-14-6>