

2014_05_18 Resurrection 5
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled, You Believe in Jesus

John 14:1-14

INI

John 14:1-14

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know."

⁵ Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

⁷ "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."

⁸ Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. ¹¹ Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

¹² "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. ¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."

Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled, You Believe in Jesus

1. He is the WAY – to the Father
2. He is the TRUTH – of the Father
3. He is the LIFE – with the Father

It really boils down to one question: who is Jesus? It was a question I was wrestling with even though I didn't know it. During my years of college I wrestled with that question more than I was aware.

I met Jason in college. Jason and I became good friends during those college years. It seemed that we saw things eye to eye. We were ready to challenge the conventional thinking; to ask tough questions; like so many – we thought we were going to change the world. We were those young guys, sitting over a glass of beer, pontificating about life and truth. We saw many things the same way – that was, however, until the question of religion came up.

When the question of religion came up we did not see things eye to eye. He wasn't an atheist, but, at the end of the day, our views about God were quite different.

I remember meeting him on water street for a glass of beer and this is how he put it: "You see Dave, there are several way to get down to water street. There are several streets and different routes you might take. However, whatever route you might go, you will eventually end up in the same place. There are many ways to God. The Christian religion is just one of those many routes. Eventually you and I end up in the same place." It troubled me. I wondered if he was right. Who am I to be so exclusive as to say my truth is the only way to God? My heart was troubled.

Although I may not have realized it at that point, this discussion really boiled down to one question: "who is Jesus?"

Dear Christians, are your hearts troubled? What troubles you? What troubled Thomas and Philip? Today we ask the question: who is Jesus and we look to Him for an answer.

We look to Him and we hear Him respond: "Let not your heart be troubled – you believe in God, believe also in Me. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No comes to the Father except through Me."

1. He is the WAY – to the Father

I wondered if the Christian faith can be so exclusive. Do we have sole rights to God? How can we exclude the dedicated Buddhist monk, for instance? How can we say that this religious person, who goes about promoting peace and kindness in the world – the very things we uphold as Christians – how can we say he does not know God? How can we say that Jesus is the Way to the Father?

And so we begin to think Jesus is too restrictive. We begin to agree with Jason that there are many roads that lead to water street. Maybe there is more than one way to God. And we join Thomas: "How can we know the way?"

Perhaps our thinking is more like the Buddhist mindset. We suppose Jesus is not the way to life; but He is more so a way of life. We see Jesus as a great man, an example of true spiritual commitment. Look at how he denied himself of worldly things. See how he was committed to non-violent protest. He was willing to give up his life rather than promote violence or warfare. We begin to think that Jesus is not the way to life; He is a way of life.

But this should trouble us. For who has reached this standard? If Jesus is a way of life, then who among us is like Jesus? Who among us is willing to sacrifice all things that this world has to offer in order to follow the call of the Father? Who among us willingly accepts, chooses our own death sentence even when we are innocent? And who is innocent? Who has given up those things which we cling to – vindication, anger, lust, fears, earthly comforts – who is innocent?

We call it the scandal of the cross; that is, it is an offense. The cross is scandalous because it teaches an exclusive Christ. Christ is exclusive because no one has gone the way He has gone. He has gone to the Father and He has gone that way through the cross and death. His thoughts have never strayed from love for God the Father; or from serving your needs in unfailing mercy and love; He has accepted the call – to sacrifice all things this world has to offer and go to the cross innocently. It is a "scandal" – an "offense," "a cause for stumbling." The words of Christ leave no room for us to maneuver around Him. There is no other way to reach the Father.

But, dear Thomas, dear Christians – let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in Jesus. He goes to prepare a place for you. He goes to death for you and He will be vindicated for you. His resurrection prepares a place – that where He is, you will be also. No one has gone this way. No man can raise himself from death. Christ then is the first fruits and He prepares you for your own resurrection. There in God's mansion is the rest from all that troubles you, all the questions and problems that plague you, all the sins that stain you. He is not a way of life; He is the way to life. He is the way to the Father. You believe in God, believe also in Him.

2. He is the TRUTH – of the Father

The Christian faith teaches many truths. But that is hardly exclusive to Christianity. For instance, "love your neighbor." It is not as if the Christian faith can claim exclusive rights to that teaching. It is part of many religions. "Do not steal." "Do not murder." These are not unique to the Christian religion. Even atheists can agree that such ideals are good for a community's wellbeing. So who is Jesus?

Some might suppose Jesus is a great teacher. He's a source of divine teachings about God but is not the sole source of the divine truth of God. He shows us things about God and teachings that lead us to the Father, but many would leave it at that. Jesus is not the truth of God, but brings us a collection of truths about God. All roads lead to water street, right?

In fact, in many ways, this sort of Jesus is no different than what the Islam faith teaches. To say that Jesus is a great prophet, a means of divine revelation, a source of true teachings is not a problem for Muslims. It is written in the Quran: "O People of the Book, exceed not the limits in your religion, and say not of Allah anything but the truth. Verily, the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was only a Messenger of Allah and a fulfilment of His word which He sent down to Mary, and a mercy from Him" (Quran 4.172).

What they do have a problem, however, is the idea that Jesus is more than a teacher. What they cannot accept is that Jesus is the Son of God. That passage from the Quran goes on: "So believe in Allah and His Messengers, and say not 'They are three.' Desist, it will be better for you. Verily, Allah is the only One God. Far is it from His Holiness that He should have a son" (Quran 4.172).

In many ways this thinking has crept into Christianity. In certain methods of preaching, we are left with a Jesus who is nothing more than a teacher. His commandments lead us to a more purpose driven life. In 10 steps, you can become a better Christian; in three step, you must be are "born again." "Methods" of the Christian faith arise under names like: "Methodism" – you start out on the porch by following you reason; you get your foot in the door by faith in Christ; and you enter the mansion when you reach: "entire sanctification."

This should trouble us greatly. Is He the Son of God or not? If He is not, then we really have no grounds to claim Islam is wrong. All roads lead to the same place in the end, right?

So Philip asks, "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus responds: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves."

Jesus is not merely source of a truth about God, He is the truth of God. No one can see or know God apart from Him. His death is not just a teaching about the sacrifices we

need to make, it is the truth of God's sacrifice. He does all this for you. He is the truth of God. That is, He is the truth of God redemptive purpose. God saves us by His grace and not our works or our commitment or our dedication to follow Jesus' teachings.

Let not your heart be troubled. The Father so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son. So now you know the truth – the truth of God is that He is exclusive: exclusively yours; exclusive in His forgiveness; exclusive in His salvation by grace; exclusive in Christ's resurrection. Jesus goes to death, and to resurrection to prepare a place for you. A place of comfort. Jesus is the Truth of the Father: believe also in Him.

3. He is the LIFE – with the Father

Many Christians have the idea that the way to become closer to God is by the life we live. There is a prevailing idea, as we've already been exploring, that by living a life like Jesus you can have a closer relationship with God the Father. Who is Jesus? Is he the life we live or is He the life God gives?

Obviously Christians want to become closer to God. We want our lives to imitate Christ and we want to grow righteous living and keep the commandments. We want to be closer to God; and so easily we suppose the life we live will get us there.

But what happens when we try to live this life? What happens when we fail? One of two things: Either 1) we are honest with ourselves and despair of life itself; we realize there is no hope for a closer relationship with God based on our efforts – in fact we probably find ourselves moving further and further away, more frustrated, more guilty. Or 2) we are dishonest with ourselves and begin watering down God's expectations for us. We bring God's righteousness down to our level where the commandments become merely outward – where God only expects us to love when we feel like it or when the other person deserves it. Such thinking makes hypocrites out of us – suddenly we see the flaws in everyone else and nothing in ourselves; we hold grudges and bitterness. And either way, in the end we all die. No one can get to the Father by the life we live.

And that is because getting closer to God is not about the life we live, but the life God gives. It is not about us going to Him, but Him coming to us.

How much closer could he have gotten? He descended from heaven to become man. He walked among us and did these wonderful works, getting his hands dirty, in the lives of sinners and those broken by sin. The works He does are life – they demonstrate life: healing a paralytic, making the blind to see, raising the dead.

How much closer? He would descend into our sinfulness and into our death and into our hell. God came to be sin for us and rose from death to give us life.

How much closer? He sends His Spirit to us. We'll study next week how He Jesus will not leave us orphans. He says: "I will come to you." So our verse of the day: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him." Through the Word, Christ sends His Spirit and gets so close that He makes His home with us.

How much closer? Well, on the last day, Christ will raise up you and all the dead, and give unto you and all who believe in Him, eternal life. You will live together with Christ in the mansion He is preparing for you. There is no closer relationship to be gained by the life we live. Instead, we are as close as can be simply by believing. Jesus is not a life that we should live, but the life that God gives.

We really don't want to end up on water street. It's a dead end. That conversation with Jason really didn't lead anywhere. I only found myself being more and more troubled. Where we want to end up is here: here in church where we are gathered in God's Spirit together; where we hear His Word and understand it together with likeminded believers.

Who is God to be so exclusive? Oh, right – He's the one who gave up His only Son for us. Its not that we have exclusive rights to Him; its that He has exclusive rights to us. For us, all roads lead to the cross and the grave and the resurrection. No other road will raise you from death. Jesus is not a way of life; He is the way to life. Jesus is not a truth about God, He is the truth of God. Jesus is not a life which we live, but the life which God gives. No one comes to the Father except through Him.

So dear Christians: let not your hearts be troubled, you believe in Jesus. Amen.