

**What You See Is What You.....?****John 14: 1-14****Don Lincoln**

I am reminded of an old story of Oliver Wendell Holmes, a giant of a Jurist, who sat on the Supreme Court for nearly 30 years before his death in 1935. But as can be the case with some grand thinkers, Holmes was also known to be absent-minded from time-to-time, including one day when he was riding the train out of Washington for the weekend.

The conductor, who recognized this famous passenger, asked for his ticket. Holmes rummaged through his pockets and bags, but couldn't find it. "Don't worry," said the conductor. "Just send us the ticket later when it turns up." Somewhat irritated, Holmes replied, "My dear sir, the problem is not "where is my ticket?" The problem is, "Where am I going?"

Ever feel like that?

The text I read is one of the most well-known Scriptures, even for folks who don't go to church, read the bible, or know anything about the faith. Because if you've been to a Christian funeral at a church, funeral home or at a graveside, chances are you've heard the opening line of Jesus' famous, 3 chapter discourse from the gospel of John. It is spoken thousands of times a year: "Let not your hearts be troubled."

And some of the most memorable, even iconic verses from John's Gospel follow that "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Hear them again:

"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places."

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

"If in my name you ask for anything, I will do it."

But because this cluster of iconic verses are so often spoken as words of comfort and promise and hope, it's easy to overlook the notes of confusion and fear, if not downright protest, also found in this story. You may or may not know this conversation is taking place the night before Jesus' crucifixion, and Jesus is preparing the disciples for His imminent departure. And when Jesus says, "You know where I am going", Thomas shoots back, "Lord, no, we haven't a clue where you are going. How can we know the way?" Hardly the words of a settled, untroubled heart.

Similarly, Philip's audacious request: "Show us the Father" – sounds like "Show me the money!" Underneath that cry is a deep longing, even a sense of desperation, to have a tangible experience of God's presence.<sup>1</sup>

Which makes this such a poignant text for us today. We, like the disciples, are struggling to figure it out; to get the picture; to understand what the heck is going on and where we're going. And as is often the case, we've started fighting about things we don't fully understand, because that's what we tend to do when uncertainty and anxiety get a grip on us.

So I am grateful for the words of isolation, confusion, and desperation in this text, along with the promises. Because pious platitudes – if that's all these words from Jesus might be – would fall on deaf ears – for the disciples, and for us if they did not acknowledge the struggle. And they do.

**Let not your hearts be troubled.** Jesus is not telling us not to be sad; not to be concerned. Jesus himself weeps at Lazarus' grave; Jesus' heart is disturbed when he knows Judas is about to betray Him. Jesus' heart is grieved when he realizes his time has come. This is not a commendation to a stoic, unfeeling life. This is a promise made by One who Himself is acquainted with sorrow, confusion, disappointment and grief.

What Jesus is saying to you and to me is that even when evil and death surround us, and are having their way with us – even when we are broken, bruised, beaten – we do not ever fully lose heart. Despite what comes, all is not lost.

And how do we know that? Jesus declares, "In my Father's house are many rooms or dwelling places." The old version was "*In my Father's house are many mansions.*" Who cares what you call the place? Sometimes we've made so much emphasis on the place itself, we've forgotten the other word that's really important – the adjective **MANY**. As author Eugene Peterson – a pastor I used to know in the Baltimore area – wrote a version of the Bible entitled "**The Message:**" And in it he writes this verse this way, "*There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home.*"

This is what settles troubled hearts. Plenty of room. If Jesus had wanted to embody narrow exclusivity, he might have said, "My father's house has just a few reserved rooms; so get your act together and command the rest of the world to do so as well, if they want a chance at a key to one of those rooms."<sup>2</sup> It's not what he says.

And listen to what Jesus says next: "If it were not so, would I have told you I go to prepare a place for you?" It's as if to say, if there **WERE** an exclusiveness to heaven, if anyone who wants entrance, who wants a room, were going to be denied one, wouldn't I have told you that's how it worked?<sup>3</sup> Do you hear that? Today? For yourself? You can trust that God has space for you – no matter who you are, or how unreliable, proud or unfinished you may be.

"SO," Jesus continues, "...if I go to prepare a place for you, (the word for YOU is plural) I will come again and take you to myself. And then he says those great words, "And you know where I am going." And then it comes. Thomas says, "No we don't know where you are going, Lord." How can we know the way?

And then comes this most beautiful line from Jesus: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

Some of us remember, back in the days before GPS – if you were in a new town or village and you couldn't figure out where you were going, you might have to stop and ask someone local for directions. And sometimes you would get something like this: Okay, take the first right, go about a mile, then take the second left, cross the square, another half mile or so, go past the church, take the third road on the right, then a ways, and the next road you want is the fourth one on the left.

At that point you look at him and say, "Could you just get in and show me?"

Jesus does not tell us **about** the way; "It's ME!", He says. I am your Way! Just follow me. Stay with me. Stick with me. I am your Way! Jesus Himself IS the way – Him; His life; His teachings; His humility; His forgiveness; His inclusivity; His hospitality; His generosity. It's about Jesus' Way – the model for our living!

Some of you may remember some years back we did the series "Be The Church." We used this picture on stationary and bulletins.



Love God, Share abundance; show compassion; forgive others; reject racism; care for the poor; serve neighbors; build community; protect creation. Be the church. **That's the way of Jesus.** Show me the money. Show me the way. THAT'S the way! You want to see God, Philip? That's what the love of God looks like in the world.

You and I **DO** know the WAY! It's living the way Jesus lived, embodying the values, postures, and truths He embodied, and spending our lives sharing the freeing, reorienting abundant life of God.

Far too often we Christians have taken Jesus' words, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me," and turned them into a weapon of exclusivity about some way to think about Jesus. Which is funny in a text in which Jesus talks about there being enough rooms in His Father's house for everybody.

The beauty of Jesus' words is this: that the way – the ways of Jesus – are indeed exactly how anyone gets to God. How anyone gets to see God. The test of this truth, indeed its essence, is in the following of Jesus as THE WAY – the model for our lives in this world and with one another – the guiding and shining example of who and what we all are to be. As people who welcome the stranger; heal the sick; care for the poor; love one another, and don't waste time bickering about doctrinal minutiae. Jesus never said "Think about me. He always said FOLLOW me!" Follow that way, and you and I will indeed see God – and the world will see God and God's ways through us.

May it be so. AMEN

1. David Lose; *In The Meantime....*; "A Faithful Lament", May 8, 2020.
2. *Connections Commentary*, Year A, Volume 2; John 14: 1-14
3. George Laird Hunt, "Living Beyond Death" – Cathedral publishers 1971.