

May 10, 2020  
Rev. Kerry Smith

John 14:1-14 Room for Everyone  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 14:1-14 New Revised Standard Version

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In 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? And 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. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” 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’? 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. 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. 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. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” I love those words. This week I have needed to hear those words. I have spent a lot of time this week in meetings talking about what it looks like when we begin worshipping face to face again. It is overwhelming. First, we would encourage those who are sick or at risk to stay home. That means the elderly, people with underlying medical conditions, family members who live with the elderly or those who are at risk. CDC guidelines tell us that there has to be a minimum of six feet between family groups, side to side and front to back. We are asked to remove all items from the pews, hymnals, paper, pencils and even pew cushions. We are asked to not pass out bulletins, offering plates, or give communion.

When we sing, droplets spread even more widely, so we aren’t supposed to sing, we aren’t supposed to have unison readings or even hum. Everyone would wear a cloth mask and when we have reached the maximum number of people with the six feet distance, we would have to turn people away. We couldn’t have a nursery for our children because of the difficulty of sanitizing all surfaces and items and we couldn’t have the children come forward for children’s time. When worship is over, we would dismiss by family groups. We couldn’t hug because we have to maintain the six feet separation and most importantly, we couldn’t have donuts or coffee. How do you turn people away as a church?

Bishop Mike McKee of the North Texas Conference has said “not yet” when he is asked about opening Methodist churches in North Texas. In a meeting with him this week, he said until the curve is flat in Dallas county, Methodist churches in Dallas county will remain closed. We want to do no harm, that is one of the General Rules of the Methodist societies after all, but it is easy to get disheartened. Then I hear Jesus’ words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Jesus says those words right after he tells Peter he will deny Jesus three times. It is on the heels of telling Peter that their relationship will be broken. “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” I can most hear Peter saying, “What do you mean ‘do not let our hearts be troubled’? Trouble is all we’ve got right now.” Jesus had also told the disciples that he was leaving. They loved Jesus. They had followed him and expected that it would pay off in the end – he would throw out the Romans or overcome their occupation, he would do something. But, instead, now he says he is

leaving. Jesus comforts his disciples with the words that we just heard. It is a remedy for a troubled heart.<sup>1</sup> Trust in God, trust in Jesus.

I love Jesus' words here, where he talks about my father's house. Jesus used that phrase, my father's house, one other time, when he spoke about the actual physical Temple. The actual physical Temple was the place where Jews believed heaven and earth met. There was a room in the center of the Temple called the Holy of Holies where Jews believed heaven met earth. Now, Jesus is saying there is a new house, a new place where heaven and earth meet, and there is room for everyone.

Then Thomas, I love Thomas, says, I'm paraphrasing here, that's nice and all Jesus but I don't get it. I love his honesty! Jesus, we don't know where we are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus speaks the words that we know so well, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

There is this gap between where Jesus is going and what he invites us to and where we are right now. It is the gap between the now and not yet that is the kingdom of God. We live in that gap and it is in that gap that God meets us.<sup>2</sup> That is home in God. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life because Jesus is the image of the invisible God. When we wonder what God is like, we only need to look to Jesus. As Christians, we are followers of Jesus and we seek to live the same kind of life Jesus lived.

That verse, the way, the truth and the life one, has often been interpreted by some as saying that Jesus is the only way. It gets lifted out of context and people forget it is said in response to Thomas' question. Jesus wasn't talking about other religions. He had been asked a question by one of his disciples. How can we know the way? Jesus isn't giving a comparative religions lecture. Jesus isn't saying Christianity is the way, the truth, and the life, he is saying that he is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus is saying that the way is relationship.

His words have often been seen as exclusionary instead of inclusive. You know, we're in so everyone else is out, but that is the antithesis of the Gospel.<sup>3</sup> Remember when Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of twelve prisoners in a youth detention center on Maundy Thursday a few years ago? In his sermon that day Pope Francis said, "It is not in soul-searching... that we encounter the Lord... We need to go out... to the outskirts where there is suffering"<sup>4</sup>

Rachel Held Evan was an author who I love. She wrote amazing books like *Searching for Sunday* and *Inspired*. This past Monday marked one year since she tragically died at the age of 37. A few years ago I went to a Conference that Rachel Held Evans and Nadia Bolz Weber put on called Why Christian. Different speakers shared why they are a Christian and Rachel Held Evans said, "I'm a Christian because the story of Jesus is still the story I'm willing to risk being wrong about."

It is by living, by participating in, by being caught up by the way of life that Jesus embodied, that was Jesus' way. The way of Jesus is the way of healing the sick, eating with sinners, resisting violence, welcoming into his community those without mothers and brothers and sisters and calling them family, washing the feet of those about to betray him, deny him, flee from him at the moment of his death. That is the way of Jesus.

The truth of Jesus is following the Torah: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love your neighbor as yourself. "Whoever has fed the hungry, given the thirsty

<sup>1</sup> <https://sarahbessey.substack.com/p/i-am-the-way-the-truth-and-the-life>

<sup>2</sup> <https://sarahbessey.substack.com/p/i-am-the-way-the-truth-and-the-life>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sarahbessey.substack.com/p/i-am-the-way-the-truth-and-the-life>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21963105>

something to drink, clothed the naked, housed the homeless, visited the prisoner, loved the unlovable has done so to me,” Jesus said. That is the truth of Jesus.

The life of Jesus is bringing good news to the poor; being sent to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; being called to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor—the year of Jubilee in which all monetary debts are erased and even creation gets to rest and recover for a whole year without planting. That is the life of Jesus.

Last week in the Thursday evening Prayer and Conversation group with New Church and Greenland Hills, Pastor Jo from New Church said, “Our faith is not dependent on us gathering.” I may want to gather because I miss you. I miss children interrupting me while I am preaching. I miss hearing you sing and seeing you here. But, our faith is not dependent on us gathering.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Know that even with separation, our relationship with God is secure. God is with us. God isn’t scared of our honesty, we can keep it real and share with God our frustrations and our sadness, our pain and our struggles. God says I am here. So, let’s love each other until all this is over and then let us continue to love each other.

Jesus words are an invitation to open the door wider. There is a new house and there is room for everyone. Jesus welcomed and included the very people we want to be left out or left behind. We are invited each and every day to walk with Jesus, wherever love leads. When doubt creeps in, when people make you crazy and when you are done with the coronavirus, remember “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Hope is with us because all that we need is already here, with us. Thanks be to God, Amen.