John 14:1-14

14‘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.’

8 Philip 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”?10 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.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.

Like Father, Like Son

Today’s passage comes from Jesus’ farewell address that his gives his disciples on Holy Thursday, the evening before his crucifixion. Things are not looking so well for Jesus and his disciples; Jesus’ heart is troubled as he announces that one of the twelve was going to betray him, and he also tells Peter that before the rooster crows he will have denied Jesus three times. And Jesus tells all the disciples in very vague terms that he is going to leave them and that they cannot follow him immediately. He doesn’t tell them that he’s going to be arrested, tried, and killed; just that he’s leaving.

My prayer for you is that you would something of the character of the Father in the Son this morning, that we would find comfort by better appreciating God’s character, and that we would see that by extension, the Holy Spirit instills that same character in us, a character that seeks to calm a troubled world and relieve the suffering of others.

It’s tempting for us to look at pre-resurrection events with a post-resurrection mindset: Jesus rises from the grave, he conquers sin and death, he ascents into heaven, and the Good News is preached with enthusiasm and conviction, leading to the founding of the Church. But how would the disciples have felt, how would they have acted, before all of this had transpired? Before they even had a clue that he would be arrested, tortured, crucified, and resurrected, when all they knew was that Jesus was leaving them? Imagine the disappointment, the anxiety, the tension, even the anger that existed at that dinner table that night. Not long ago they had entered Jerusalem. Jesus had been at the top of his game. People were expecting something big to happen; Jesus was not only capable of amazing feats – calming storms, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, casting out demons, feeding thousands on a fishes and bread - but he was also smart – he could take on the authority of the priests and likely the Romans as well, and he was compassionate – he loved the people and they loved him. And the disciples were poised to take on their roles as courtesans to the new King Jesus. They were Jesus’ handpicked deputies who had trained for their positions for three years, and it was almost payoff time. And now comes the bombshell: “I’m leaving you. You won’t see me for awhile. Good luck, guys.” To say that the disciples were upset would be an understatement. They were like children whose parents abandon them in a supermarket. They felt lost and vulnerable and helpless. They felt like soldiers, ill-equipped and waiting for the enemy to strike. The disciples were quite aware that Jesus had enemies. How would those enemies deal with the disciples of an absentee Messiah? The disciples must have felt panic.

And Jesus says, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, and believe in me. I’m going to prepare a place for you to rest at my Father’s house, and you know how to get there.” Well actually Jesus, we don’t know how to get there. Thomas is the first one to say something: “Lord, we don’t know where you’re going. How can we know the way?”

And Jesus chimes in with another of those famous “I AM” statements that are so prevalent in John’s gospel: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Now it’s clear that the disciples are having their doubts about Jesus. Judas had already run off to sell out the Master. Jesus had indicated that Peter, the Rock, would falter when put to the test; no doubt the other ten were no more faithful or bold than Peter. And if Jesus was about to leave them for the safety of his Father’s house, the disciples wanted the same sanctuary.

At that moment, Jesus was not looking too promising to the disciples. Moses had parted the Red Sea, he had drawn water from rocks. Elijah had called down fire from heaven. But without Jesus, the disciples doubted that they could do much of anything against the priests or the Roman overlords. They were about to become a movement without a leader. And what would they tell the crowds that had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with such enthusiasm? “Uh, Jesus had some business to take care of. He said he’ll be back…soon. Where did he go? We’re not so clear on that…something about his father’s house…but don’t let your hearts be troubled.” *Indeed!*

And I believe that Philip spoke on behalf of the whole group when he said, “Lord, just show us the Father and we’ll be satisfied.” “Considering the latest newsflash, the fact that you’re leaving us and going to the Father, we would feel a little less distressed if you could just show us the Father, Jesus.”

Now it was well-known among all good Jews that no man could see God face to face and live. So for Philip to ask Jesus to show him the Father was quite bold. Perhaps Philip now doubted that Jesus was in fact the messiah, that didn’t truly know the Father. Perhaps he was calling Jesus’ bluff. “You’ve led us this far, Jesus. And now you’re abandoning us? Do you truly know the Father?”

Jesus could have asked Philip the same question: “Do you really know the Father, Philip? You’ve been dreaming of how God’s reign will be established in Jerusalem, then in Israel, then perhaps throughout the world. You imagine it to involve a hostile takeover, expelling the priests, defeating the Romans. Will you be the first to draw blood, Philip? Will you exact justice or retribution upon those you defeat? And where will the battle end, Philip? Rome? Or beyond? Will it ever end? Will your Father rejoice as you dance on the graves of your enemies? Is that the Father you wish to see, Philip?”

Jesus could have asked this, but instead he displayed the very patience of the Father, a loving Father who give his own son to defeat the evil that would enslave humanity to an endless struggle for power and glory that would leave a trail of blood and tears.

So instead Jesus asks, “Philip, have I been with you all this time and yet you still don’t know me? These things that I’ve done and said have not been to advance my own agenda, but that of the Father. He dwells in me and I in Him.” So Philip gets a crash course on Christology here. Jesus is completely tied to the Father. The two cannot be separated.

The answer that Jesus gives us is both shocking and gentle: It’s shocking in the sense that it contradicts what a fallen and sinful humanity conceive God to be – grand, powerful, and fearful…much the way we would like people to see us. Someone to be reckoned with. These are the very attributes that must have passed through the minds of our ancestors as they held the forbidden fruit in front of their mouths: “I could be great, that powerful, that wise.”

It was because we had strayed so far from understanding God that God entered our world to reveal his true nature. Loving, gentle, patient, and desiring nothing more than our love in return. He comes not as an abstraction, not as a hypothetical concept, but as flesh and blood, prepared to bleed and to die for those he loves. As he faces his own trial, humiliation, suffering, and death, his first impulse is to calm his disciples: “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Your God is not going to abandon you to your own sin which will lead you to certain death. He has better plans for you. He has room for you.” Believe in the true God. Believe in Jesus Christ.

And let us, my brothers and sisters, worship and glorify this God who selflessly offers himself for us. Let us surrender to His will in order that, by His Holy Spirit, Christ might be seen in us. Let us be his Church, his children, displaying the same gentle nature, the same care and concern that our Lord showed to a rather brash Philip and a cynical group of disciples. And let us draw joy and comfort from God’s promise that we are never abandoned by him.