

The Way to the Father – 12th July 2009

John 14:1-14

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Today we encounter the fourth sermon in our sermon series from John – a Gospel that spells out some very key and fundamental pillars of our Christian Faith. It reminds us of who Jesus is. It makes it very clear he is – “both fully man and fully God”. It helps us see that in Jesus’ full humanity, we can see everything about God’s character that can be conveyed in human terms. And in our passage today one key message emerges – loud and clear – “the way to the Father”...With it several other points jump out that help us along that journey.

1. Trust in Jesus
2. Faith in Jesus
3. Ask in Jesus

1. Trust in Jesus

So let’s start by looking at how this passage calls us to trust in Jesus. Have you ever really struggled with something and yet instead of receiving support found yourself supporting people who seem blind to what you are going through. Let me give you an example... About nine months ago my Boss suddenly announced that he was leaving. To me he was the best boss I had ever had. Now out of the blue he was going. I can tell you my heart was troubled. My reaction was shock, worry, anxiety and concern for me. How would I manage without him? And yet I showed no concern for him. He was leaving to become a house husband to three girls all under the age of five that he and his wife had adopted a few months earlier. It didn’t even enter my head that he was giving up his whole career and making a huge sacrifice for the sake of these three little ones. I was blind to what he was facing.

The beginning of our reading reveals something similar and conveys one aspect of the wonderful nature of Jesus that we are all called to try and model. In verse one we hear Jesus say...“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

Recognise that at this time Jesus knew he would be heading for the agony of the cross and so quite rightly Jesus is deeply ‘troubled’ in heart (John 12:27: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?"). So surely it should be the disciples giving him emotional and spiritual support. And yet we witness completely the opposite. It is actually Jesus who gives, comforts and instructs because he recognizes his disciples are troubled not because they are moving towards pain, sham and crucifixion like he was, but because they are confused, threatened and uncertain of what Jesus has been talking about previous to this passage, where Jesus refers to his imminent departure.

In chapter 13:33 he has said to the disciples "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come." Their whole world had been so wrapped up with Jesus over the last few years so the prospect of his departure must have been devastating.

So here we witness the disciples deeply disturbed, confused and not really sure what’s going on. And yet Jesus despite his own predicament still puts them first as he seeks to calm their hearts saying in the second part of verse 1 Trust in God; trust also in me.

How important those words were for the disciples and how important they remain for us today. Within Chineham most of us have enough food, somewhere to live and can obtain some form of health care unlike millions in the third world who don’t have these needs met. Having plenty, however, does not equal peace of mind. By my own admission even though I profess to be a follower of Jesus and have a pretty comfortable lifestyle - I still feel anxiety – indeed I guess we all do from time to time.

Jesus addresses the ‘troubled hearts’ of the disciples then and at the same time our troubled hearts today by urging us, first of all, to trust. If Jesus speaks the words of God and performs the acts of God should he not be trusted like God? If he tells his followers not to let their hearts be troubled, must it not be because he has ample and justifiable reason? Indeed Jesus goes on to re-assure the disciples that his leaving them is not the unmitigated disaster they imagine as we begin to discover in verses 2 and 3. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Jesus explains his departure is for the disciples’ advantage. Yes - he is going away, but he is going away to prepare a place for them and he will come back and get them so that they may be where he is. What more could they ask for? In fact what more could we ask for? Jesus is talking about heaven, and Jesus has gone there to prepare a place for the disciples he was speaking to then and to prepare a place for all his subsequent followers. And recognize it is the going itself, via the cross and resurrection, that prepares the place for Jesus’ disciples then and now.

These first three verses demonstrate something very special – ‘the way to eternal life’ although unseen, it is secure – as secure as your trust in Jesus. He has already prepared the way to eternal life. So the only issue that may still be unsettled is our willingness to believe, to trust.

So with this in mind let’s move to verse 4 and our second point

2. Faith in Jesus

In verse 4 Jesus says...You know the way to the place where I am going.

Imagine you were one of those disciples at that time. This I suspect was like one of those moments in a school lesson or a business meeting where the teacher or the big boss says something and everyone is looking around thinking ‘I haven’t got a clue what he’s going on about but I’m not going to admit it’. So it’s with some relief that the disciples then hear Thomas pipe up and say probably

what they are all thinking: "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" It is easy to look at Thomas and the rest of the disciples and think they were being a bit dim – but if we are honest given the same situation would we have done any better?

We all like unambiguous answers. It is clear the disciples have not really come to grips with what Jesus has said about his destination. And, so now we hear Jesus respond both to them and indeed to us today as he says this... "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

This is about as clear cut as it gets... The way to heaven is Jesus himself. Faith in him shatters the barrier of sin and death, and smashes open the road to eternal life. Jesus is also the truth and the life. The reality and truth of God are incarnated in Jesus Christ and so no-one comes to the Father except through Jesus!

We all recognize that this is difficult for many people to swallow. I was talking to my nephew at Christmas who seemed interested in my faith and yet seemed convinced that we could reach God in whatever way we felt comfortable with it. But... if we are to believe Jesus then I'm afraid my nephew is simply wrong. Look at Acts 4:12, it says: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." And yet when my nephew made his comments how did I react? Sadly I failed to tell the truth. I didn't turn round and say 'no you've got it wrong' – sure I didn't agree with him but unfortunately I also didn't take the opportunity to explain this wonderful gospel message. I guess I didn't want to get heavy handed but at the same time here was the possibility of helping him take those first steps towards Jesus. I didn't trust that Jesus through the Holy Spirit would lead me.

If in Jesus, God has come among us in person to reconcile his rebellious lost world, it follows necessarily that through him, and him alone, is the way to God. If I am to follow Jesus' great commission to go and make disciples I need to realize that he isn't just the way for me – no - he is the way for all, and so whatever the religious background of an individual, or lack of religion, Jesus in his grace welcomes every one of them to the Father if they will come through him.

For everyone he is ready to prepare a place in the Father's house. So never give up on that spouse, parent, brother, sister or friend who just seems to deny Jesus. Keep praying for them no matter how disheartening it may seem. Take every opportunity that comes your way (and I confess I am being hypocritical as I say that) but its amazing how hope suddenly emerges. Neither my brother or sister knows Jesus so what a joy it was to witness them both coming to the baptism service last Sunday – I have to keep praying for the Holy Spirit to open their hearts and bring them to Jesus. I'm sure we all have similar people close to us for whom we must do the same. Jesus began his search and rescue operation on earth by his life, death and resurrection. He continues it today through the power of his Holy Spirit, and he graciously invites us to participate with him by loving those who are lost.

Lets move on now to verse 8 where we see that despite Jesus' explanation there are more questions from the disciples. As Philip says: Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" In verses 9 to 11 Jesus effectively responds by saying. 'But I already have!' 'You've seen me, so you've seen my Father!' He asks them to believe him again (he is not just telling the truth, he is the truth), and he tells them that the words they've heard from him are not just things he's made up, but are the words that God speaks through him – the things he has done are things that God has done through him – and by attending to those things we can know God the Father through his Son. He explains that even if they can't believe his words, they can believe the things they've seen him do, and the things they've been involved with themselves. These words of explanation are also for us, we can know that he is the same yesterday, today and forever, we can be sure that we can trust Jesus' words and his actions to reveal God to us now.

Jesus is the life. He is in the Father and the Father in him. And recognize that if you have given your life to Jesus you are already in effect in eternal life. And Jesus calls us to live life to the full. You see eternal life is now – it's about life before death, to quote the Christian Aid adverts.

So lets move on to our third and final point –

3. Ask in Jesus.

Verse 12: I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

This sounds staggering. But think about it - the works after the resurrection are greater than those done by Jesus before his death because following his death on the cross and resurrection we are able to see the true meaning of his mission. Before that time even to his closest followers, (as the previous verses demonstrate) understood only part of what he was saying. The 'signs' and 'works' Jesus performed during his ministry **could not** fully accomplish their true end **until after** Jesus had risen from the dead and been exalted. Now a new order has dawned and only at that point could they be seen for what they were.

By contrast, we are blessed to live in the knowledge of Jesus' death and resurrection and so the work we do now in his name through the power of the Holy Spirit follows on after Jesus' glorification, and is set in the framework of Jesus' death and triumph, and therefore more immediately reveals who he truly is.

And then in verses 13 and 14 Jesus really blows their minds and ours too! He continues that anything that his disciples ask in his name **will be** done, for the glory of his Father. So what's all this about? It is important to understand here that all of Jesus' work was aimed at bringing glory to his father, and this is the work he is commissioning his disciples, and us, to continue. He is not talking about self-gratifying prayers, or prayers that are especially to our advantage, although many of those prayers might in our view also glorify God. He is talking about things that bring the kingdom of God closer to completion, things that build his church, and build up his family. These things might be miraculous or might be practical, but we have to pray and ask in him. As Jesus said of his own work, in verse 10: "the words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." Jesus is telling his disciples these things shortly before his arrest, to prepare them for the coming events.

He knew that they would not be able to stand up for him as they wanted to, and that they didn't understand everything he had told them about the kingdom of heaven. And yet he wanted to let them know that the apparent failures they would experience are not the end of the story. He wanted to give them hope for the time ahead, that they were still acceptable to God and would do great things in

furthering his Father's kingdom. In fact, their weakness would make it even more apparent that God was doing great things through them. In our human fallibility we will fall short of the glory of God, but we can take heart from the experience of the first disciples. We know that God's glory can be revealed in the way we live, in spite of our weakness, and that knowledge should help us to live more boldly and encourage us to pray more boldly. Whatever our weaknesses or mistakes, God can still do the work he intends to do through us despite any blundering or fumbling on our part. Whatever our strengths or weaknesses, God can still do great things through us and with us. Because through Jesus we all have a place in God's plan and in his heart and in his home.

So whatever we do, whether giving a helping hand to someone hurting, sponsoring a child, telling the gospel story to our neighbour, speaking out our testimony, a simple smile or maybe preaching to thousands – it must be done by trust and faith and asking in Jesus. There is no other way to 'work the works of God'. And it is only through Jesus that we find our way to the Father.