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John 14:1-14

"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.

In our bible studies, we have been talking about how important it is to recognize the lenses that we wear when we read scripture. When we go to our holy texts, we bring our whole selves to the text--all the good and all the bad and all the inbetween. And others bring all of themselves to it, too. And I think that's why, sometimes, two people, two denominations, can read the same text and come out of it with such different perspectives. We bring our experiences, our race, our gender, our trauma, our love, our previous teachings, and our everything when we read it.

And I think that's sometimes what is so hard about when we read this text. This text has traditionally been used to exclude and to limit who and what heaven looks like. But I look to who Jesus was and who he was talking to--and what I see is a teacher comforting his students in a time of trauma. Which is why it is so beautiful to me that this text came up this Sunday, right in the midst of COVID-19.

Jesus says, "Don't be troubled. If you know me, which you do--you know my Father. I'm going to make a space for you and you know where I'm going!"

Sweet Thomas, like so many of us, wants the details--wants the specifics. Jesus is giving comfort and Thomas wants a road map, a surefire way of knowing. And don't we all? Don't we all want to know exactly how to be 100% sure that we're marked as "good?"

And Jesus responds by saying that he himself is the way: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And this is where the tricky part comes, the threat of exclusion, which is a violent one.

Jesus is calling the disciples back into trust and relationship, saying--you know me, friends. You know what you need to do. If you know me(which you do)--you know God. Rest in the truth and do not be troubled!

Why is it so hard to trust? This statement by Jesus is a promise, a word of comfort to his disciples. Jesus himself is all they need; no need to panic, no need to search desperately for a secret map or a secret buzzword to know "for sure."

This text is so often used at funerals or besides to comfort people as they transition from life here to life eternal. And I don't want to rip that text from those moments--it makes sense that we have often used this text then. But what this text is actually about is the mission and purpose of Jesus' life--the journey of Jesus' mission and whole livelihood is to spread knowledge of his Father, to reveal who God is. Jesus, who has come from God and is now returning there, is the closest vision and picture of who God is. And so--if we want to know who God is, we need look no further than Jesus. All the words that Jesus has spoken, all the works that he has done, all the people who he has sat at table with, all of those things come from God and show us who God is.

We ask God for a road map and Jesus gives us a promise--one so good that we feel like we need to make it exclusive, and think that it must be only for us. We think there is only so much love to go around. Like siblings fighting over who is the parents favorite, we take Jesus' promise to us and make it about everyone else.

Instead, may we open our hearts, homes, and tables to use this text to share that the love of God isn't a thing we hold on tight to, something we mark off things on a checklist to get, but that it's what we know by being in relationship.

And then, we get to another hard love moment from Jesus: "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." In times like these, where we are pushing into numbers larger than some of our most tragic days, it's easy to ask "where is God?" And when we can't find God, it's even easier to give up faith. Sincerely, it is easy to see God when life is good and smooth and the connection is so clear.

My prayer for you this week is just what this text calls us to: to lean into your faith, to lean into trust, and lean into your relationship with Christ.

Jesus promises to be with us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to work in and with us to spread the Love of God, break the chains of the oppressed, share bread with the hungry, clothe the clothless, and to build bigger tables. And as we know, this does not always happen in easily visible, spectacular, written in the sky kind of ways. Yet wherever there is healing, reconciling, love-giving work happening, this is the work of God. Wherever there is love in abundance, there is Jesus' presence in our midst. Go and be the love in abundance this week. Amen.