

## John 14, 1-14

### Which Way

If ever there was a passage of scripture that has caused harm this would be one of them. There are verses in this particular reading that people have used to exclude others in ways that have been harmful likely since they were written. Which brings me to context for just a moment.

Here we are just over a month out from Easter. Our texts have been about what happened after the resurrection and the people who encountered Jesus in those days after the resurrection and before the ascension. You have likely heard the statement, "Location, location, location!" Well, this is one of those moments when location is the context. The reading, as I said, is coming after our celebration of Easter and before the Ascension, but it is also important to remember two other things. First scripture was not written in the moment. If you were to open your Bible you would see that this story actually comes before the crucifixion. It is told as part of what is called the farewell discourse, Jesus' words to his closest friends before he dies. He knows he will die, but the followers of Jesus are yet hopeful for an overturning of a regime.

This story takes place after Jesus washes the disciples' feet and foretells how he will be betrayed by one of them, and how Peter will deny him three times before the cock crows. And as he speaks to them about dwelling places and how he will prepare a place for them, he is attempting to prepare them for when he will no longer be physically present with them. They haven't figured that out, as you may have deduced by Thomas' statement "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"<sup>1</sup> But Jesus is trusting that what he says in this moment will resonate and be remembered later. And the fact that we find these stories in the gospels and particularly here in John attests to the fact that these things were remembered and written down as important.

But let's get back to the story, the retelling, and how, after the fact, some of these statements in this scripture passage have been used in ways that are not helpful.

This first part talks about dwelling places and this wonderful passage has brought comfort to grieving people for centuries. First of all, the statement "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." English has a hard time translating the Greek well as words in English just don't line up perfectly and so we miss the fact that

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this is not about individuals, though it can be read that way, it is more so about being together, in community, don't let your collective heart be troubled.

Another word that can be translated more than one way is *believe*. This word is found in verses 1 and then 10 through 12. The translation of believe could have as easily be trust rather than believe. *Trust* in God; *trust* also in me. At verse 10 "Do you not *trust* that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" or "*Trust* me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then *trust* because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who *trusts* in me will also do the works that I do..."

Suddenly this passage goes from feeling very exclusive, like only if you are a Christian and believe in Jesus can you experience God, to a rather more inclusive view of how God works in the world. And to be sure, I am not attempting to water down our understanding of the Christian faith. It is a faithful expression of God in the world. Jesus was clear that "Whoever has seen [Jesus] has seen the Father" But maybe this is not the only way that God works in the world.

We believe that all people are made in the image of God, not just Christians, and if that is so, personally, I have to trust that God is at work in all kinds of ways in the world, not just in ways that I have come to understand. There is that word again. Trust. It is about trusting that God is at work and that Jesus was who he said he was. For Christians, Jesus is the expression of God in the world. At Christmas we proclaim Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us. And that understanding permeates everything that we read in scripture and how we experience, know, and trust that the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Teacher, is at work in and through us and others now in Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

Let's once again look at the words of scripture, remembering that this story is told after the fact. It has been remembered, shared, written down to demonstrate that there is something worth thinking about here. These words often sound exclusive, but it is because the context is the fledgling Christian community that is trying to live faithfully into what they now know to be true of God, of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit, and of each other. These words were never meant to harm but to bring hope, peace, and build relationship between those who had come to believe that Jesus truly is the Son of God in ways that could be hopeful, filled with peace, and in relationship to others as well.

"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places." What if we looked at this as more inclusive of God's good creation and the diversity of the world and humanity. And to dwell is not about a physical place it is more about being in relationship. It is about abiding in a relationship with God. Again, we make scripture so personal, and that is fine, it is good, it is comforting, but we must never forget that scripture is written for people in community, in relationship, it is never so personal that it excludes other people as individuals or as community.

It means that there can be very diverse expressions of faith in God and that is a challenging statement in a time when religions of all variations and variety are being

used as a weapon. However, that too is nothing new. And one might say then, how do we know who has got it right? A couple of things here. We are not the judge...God is. But one thing that can help us understand where God is in this is if you see people acting from a place of love. And maybe that brings us to verse 11, "Trust me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then *trust* because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who *trusts* 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."

And what did Jesus do? Jesus loved people, especially those who were suffering and on the margins. Jesus healed them, taught them, fed them, and talked with them. Jesus loved.

That is the mark of abiding, of dwelling, of relationship. The mark is love. If any faith demonstrates love they are demonstrating who God is. For Christians, we love because God first loved us and that love was demonstrated as God, in Jesus, made a new way for us to be in relationships of love, forgiveness, hope, grace, and so much more, with God and with each other, the neighbour we know, the family we know, and the neighbour we don't know.

Faith is a gift, but as Christians, works are our response to gift of forgiveness, of grace and of love that is offered to us through our belief in Christ Jesus. We work to make the world a more loving place, a place where every life is precious and valuable. A world where justice prevails and those who would harm others are held accountable, but also extended grace as they repent of the harm they have caused.

One last comment, as it is likely one of the questions I am asked often, and it has to do with praying in Jesus' name. In verse 13 we read, "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."

Again, remember this was written to and for communities of people who had experienced Jesus' love in life and in death. This is written in the context of community, knowing the sacrifice of love that was experience in and through Christ. This means that your prayers must align with that of love.

I think that this verse is maybe made clearer through Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of scripture in *The Message*. Here we read, "From now on, whatever you request along the lines of who I am and what I am doing, I'll do it. That's how the Father will be seen for who he is in the Son. I mean it, whatever you request in this way, I'll do."<sup>2</sup>

So which way of expression of God is the right way? Which way is the right way to pray? Which way is the best way to be in community? Which way is the right way to live? The answer continuously comes back to love. If you do all things from a place of love, trusting that the source of that love is God then you can determine for yourself

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<sup>2</sup> [The Message \(MSG\)](#) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

which is the way. You will know the way the truth and the life because you know that God is love, that you are loved, and that our highest calling is to love.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.