

## **John 14:1-14**

<sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>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? <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going.” <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” <sup>9</sup>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’? <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

### **The Way Home May 14, 2017**

One of my childhood memories living in Michigan is of going up north on vacation. I remember one particular time, we all piled into the station wagon after my step-father Max got off work, and headed up north. I think it was somewhere around Higgins Lake. We arrived at night of course and I remember we couldn’t get the heat going in the little cabin; of course, Max took care of that. I still remember the smell of the pine trees as we drifted off to sleep that night.

The next morning was beautiful and I remember we kids decided to go explore in the woods. I remember that we had walked for some time and we found ourselves in the middle of an open pasture with trees all around us. Suddenly we all realized that we couldn’t remember which way was home. We couldn’t see which way we had come or which way to go. Everything looked the same and we began to panic, which always helps! I think we were all screaming and some of us beginning to cry. And then suddenly there was Max at the edge of the woods, waving his arms and shouting, “Over here! Over here!” Calling us home, showing us the way. You can imagine how relieved we were and how safe we felt. And it is one memory of my step-father that I will always hang on to and one which I shared at his funeral a few years ago.

The disciples might be feeling the same way this morning. Jesus has just washed their feet and told them in no uncertain terms that the end is near. He will be betrayed and his time with them is short. They have shared their last meal together and he just told Peter that he would deny him three times before morning. They must have been feeling confused, lost, and a little panicked. They clearly are confused about what is going to happen and even after all this time they don’t recognize that God is present not only in Jesus, but in them. Jesus is going away, but before he does, he reminds them that there is hope for the future.

This reading we hear today is often one that we hear at funerals. “In my Father’s house, there are many dwelling places...I will go and prepare a place for you and I will come again to lead you home. Do not be troubled and do not be afraid.” Wonderful words of comfort that remind us that home is where Jesus and God dwell and that we too will find our way there in due course. It is a resurrection story. But maybe like Thomas

and Phillip, we too, wonder at times which way to go. How can we know the way? What road do we take? Where is God in all of this?

Because sometimes I too feel like Jesus has gone away. I feel alone and abandoned in life and wonder which way to go. My faith is tested and sometimes falters, and like Peter I deny him and then run away and weep in grief and loneliness. How can I know the way? And where are you God when I need you?

And Jesus responds by saying, “I am the way, I am the road, I am the gate, I am the truth, also the life. The way home is this way. The way home is by doing the very things that I have taught you to do and care about. Loving the Lord with all your hearts and souls and loving your neighbors as yourselves. That God is present in your life just as he is present in mine. Seeing God in others is what this is all about. How did you not see that after all this time together?”

I love John Peterson’s version of this text and maybe it will speak to you as well. It goes like this, “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on you do know him. You’ve even seen him! Phillip said, “Master, show us the Father; then we’ll be content.” “You’ve been with me all this time, Phillip, and you still don’t understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, ‘Where is the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren’t mere words. I don’t just make them up on my own. The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act.

“Believe me: I am in my Father and my Father is in me. If you can’t believe that, believe what you see—these works. The person who trusts me will not only do what I’m doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I’ve been doing. You can count on it. 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.”

The way home is in doing the things that Jesus did and he tells us that we will do greater things than he did if we abide in him and he abides in us. Now you may be thinking that is crazy talk. I can’t heal the sick or do miracles or feed 5 thousand people, or forgive sins, or, or, or...but you would be wrong about most of that. The more you recognize Jesus being present in your life the more his love is revealed, and the more you can do.

And perhaps it is when you feel the most lost and panicked that you need to be serving others? That the way to heaven and heaven’s home is abiding in the work that Jesus calls you too. It isn’t some other place, but something that is so mysteriously aligned with this place that we see it only through a mirror dimly, when we see it at all. That Jesus and God are revealed as we serve one another, doing just as he taught us. That we aren’t spending our lives worrying about heaven or hell but that we continue to bring the love of Jesus to all the world.

Retired Presbyterian Pastor Joanna Adams, shared this personal story in one her sermons about a young man in one of her first congregations. He was an advertising executive on the rise in his profession. Every Tuesday night he volunteered at the foot clinic for the homeless people who made their home in their church gymnasium.

“Robert was his name. He was the nattiest dresser I had ever seen. I can picture him now in my mind's eye, wearing a crisp shirt, red suspenders. I see him sitting on a stool before the chair on which one of our homeless guests is sitting. He takes the guest's feet and places them in a basin of warm water. He takes a towel and dries the feet. He applies ointment to their sores. The ritual ends with the gift of a clean, white pair of socks. I see the man in the chair, as he slips his socks on, brush a tear from his own cheek—a tough guy whom no one has touched with tenderness in a very long time.

I once asked Robert, the advertising executive on the move, why he came to the foot clinic every week. He brushed me aside, saying, "I figure I have a better chance of running into Jesus here than most places. That's

all." I watched him week after week. I realized as I watched him that I was developing my own sort of double vision. I was seeing Christ in the stranger that he served. I was also seeing Christ in the one who was finding deep meaning in his life through serving others."

Jesus said, "The person who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these." So, what can you do? Can you wash feet, make a cake, donate clothes, drive a car, knit a scarf, dog or cat sit, deliver food or firewood? Can you sing or act, read or pray, protest or organize, visit the lonely, feed the sick, care for the orphan or widow? Can you make a phone call, send a card, take someone to lunch, hold open a door, pick up trash, or rake leaves? How many ways can you serve others in your daily life?

I believe this is one way to the place that Jesus is preparing for us, and when we do these things, we experience heaven on earth in ways that are beyond our understanding. And yes, of course we live in two worlds, with one foot in both places it seems, and we live in the hope that our next journey will be elsewhere. But until then, we abide in him and do the heavenly work that he has called us to do. And my hope is that our lives will be more abundant for it as we extend God's welcome for all to come home. Like my step-father Max, I hope we can all be at the trees edge waving and calling, "Over here. Over here. This is the way home! Come on in this house!"

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.