

“Trust & Faith” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
May 14, 2017 Fifth Sunday of Easter
John 14: 1-14

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Before this section of John’s biography of Jesus, the disciples had just finished their last meal with Jesus. He had washed their feet – a scandal for the master to wash the disciples’ feet. Jesus had told them that one of them was going to betray them and Judas left the group to do just that. Jesus had said to the disciples, **“Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’”** (John 13:33) And finally, he had told Peter, **“Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.”**

The disciples were trying to make sense of what was happening. The ground under their feet was shaking. This was probably an 8.0 quake - serious. They had heard that their teacher was leaving them, that Judas had turned against them, and that Peter was going to deny knowing Jesus three times. They probably were shaken to the core when they heard these revelations.

No wonder Jesus said, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”** Jesus wanted the disciples to calm down. Jesus was calling them back to the fundamentals. Trust and believe in him. Jesus explains where he is going. He’s going back to God, and Jesus will prepare a place for them there. Jesus is trying to reassure the disciples. But they just don’t seem to ‘get it.’

Jesus said, **“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?”** The place that Jesus said he is preparing for the disciples and for us is not really a physical place, but place in this context, means being in the intimate presence of God. What a wonderful place to be!

Thomas can’t quite grasp what Jesus is saying and asks for directions. Thomas wants to know where Jesus is going and how the disciples can get there. Thomas, the literal disciple wants the facts. What Jesus is saying is a bit too nebulous for Thomas. If you remember Nathan’s sermon a few weeks ago, Thomas was the one who wouldn’t believe Jesus was raised from the dead until he put his hands in Jesus’ wounds. Yes, Thomas wanted the facts, just the facts.

Aren’t we often like Thomas? We have trouble trusting God for direction in our lives. We want some sign, something tangible, so we can know where God is guiding us.

We'd prefer a map with the route highlighted or a setting on our GPS with turn-by-turn directions.

Jesus replies to Thomas with these well-known words: **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Unfortunately, these words have not always been used to comfort people as Jesus intended them to comfort the disciples. Often these words have been used to threaten people. These words have been used to try to establish an exclusive club; a club of those that are in and those that are out.

But that is not what Jesus is telling Thomas. Jesus is saying there's no need for a map, no need to panic. Jesus is all that the disciples and you and I need. Jesus is reassuring the disciples who are confused and unsure of what is going to happen in their lives.

Jesus adds: **“If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”** Jesus wants the disciples to understand that he, Jesus, is from God and if you have seen Jesus you have seen God. God and Jesus are one.

Now Philip gets involved in the conversation. Philip is just as confused as Thomas. He seems to be saying that he has no idea what Jesus is talking about. He's not quite convinced that Jesus is God when he asks for proof, **“Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”** Both Thomas and Philip can't seem to grasp that God is right in front of them. They are looking for a path when the path is right in front of them.

Jesus may have been a bit frustrated when he replied to Philip. Philip hasn't grasped that Jesus' whole mission is to make God known to the people, to reveal God's love for humanity, to show us how God wants us to live. Jesus is telling the disciples and us that through his ministry, he revealed to us the person and character of God. Jesus tells Philip that all the words and works that he, Jesus, has done come from God and show us who God is.

At this point, Jesus says something that is difficult to understand, not only for the disciples at that moment, but also for us today. Jesus says: **“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.”** What are we, today, to make of Jesus' words?

Jesus raised the dead and healed the blind. Is Jesus saying we can do the same? All of us have known pain when we asked for a healing that didn't come or the feeling of being powerless as we watch disease ravage the body of someone we care for or watch a loved one die a slow, painful death.

“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.” Did the miracles that Jesus

performed convince those in John's Gospel that Jesus was the son of God, that they were seeing God perform these miracles right before their eyes? The answer, of course, is no. Perhaps these are not the types of works that Jesus is talking about.

Note that Jesus says we can do these greater works because he is going to the Father. In John 16: 7 Jesus explains that he must go to the father so the Holy Spirit can come. **“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate (meaning the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”** Through the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through each of us, God accomplishes God's purpose. Those 'purposes' may not be as dramatic as Jesus' miracles. But a healing, a reconciling, a simple kind word, a donation to the less fortunate, a work towards peace and justice, these are the works that Jesus wants us to carry on in his place. These 'works' display to all to see and experience God and his love for everyone.

We acknowledge that at times we may be as confused as the disciples. We may question what God is up to in our lives or how we can serve him. We may not understand what God had prepared for us. There are days we may doubt if we've seen God in Jesus.

We acknowledge that at times we doubt, but we have these reassuring verses from Jesus that if we know Jesus we know God and that we can do great things. That takes trust and faith. Trust to move forward often not knowing where we are going. Faith to stay on the path.

Insert Ann Margaret story here.

Trust and faith. As Christ-followers, we know that true intimacy with God comes from trust and faith – and we desire that intimacy as we walk our walk of faith on this earth until we are in the intimate presence of God forever.