

## Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year A (10 May 2020)

**Lectionary reading: John 14:1-14**



Today's gospel passage is often read at funerals, and it's easy to see why – it contains promises that are profoundly comforting in the face of the death of a loved one. However, this text is not only about life after death, it is a text that has everything to do with our lives here and now.

In our gospel reading from John, Jesus is in the midst of what is commonly known as his “Farewell Discourse.” And he is speaking about a very common human problem - Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples.

They're gathered together for support and strength. They know that Jesus has made people in authority angry, and that he is facing increased pressure and threat.

Jesus of course knows where this is all headed – he knows he's already made a turn toward the cross, and that soon his earthly ministry will be over. And so, as a loving leader, he's trying to give them the words of comfort and hope that he knows they're going to need for the difficult days ahead.

I'm sure all of us will know something of the pain and the sense of deep grief that comes with having to say goodbye in one form or another – be it the loss of a loved one either through death or estrangement, or the goodbye's that come when families are separated by distance, not knowing when we will see them again. For some life will have changed in ways that could not have been imagined as it did for Jesus' disciples.

Jesus says to his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” Jesus was their friend... Their Rabbi... Their Messiah.... Their Lord... Yes Jesus is preparing them for his death. But more than that, he’s preparing them for their own future without him.

Jesus wants them to know that after he is physically gone, his work needs to continue, through them. They will be his body. They will do the same, great things he has been doing. They will be responsible for preaching good news to the oppressed, healing those in need, feeding the hungry.

But of course it’s hard for the disciples to hear any of this. When Jesus tells them that he’s leaving – that he’s “going ahead,” they don’t really understand. They want the road map. They want the GPS co-ordinates! They want to know where he’s going, and how they can get there to this safe place where Jesus will be. Thomas is the one who is bold enough to ask the question – How can we know the way?

Jesus does not answer them with the words that they want to hear. He says to them if you know me, you know God and adds “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Jesus tells them they already have the map in front of them. They've been *living* the way of the kingdom. The way is simple... Follow what Jesus sets out for them...

I find Thomas’s question remarkably comforting. I think that’s what we all want, isn’t it? When the way forward is unclear... when the future is unknown, we long for things to just be clear. We want exact instructions, we want detail. We want for the path to be clearly laid out and free of obstacles.

This couldn’t be more true than in our present time as Prime Minister, Scott Morrison details Australia's three-step path out of coronavirus lockdown, and we wait to see what it means for us, both individually and collectively and for our church. There is anticipation and relief as we look forward to life returning to ‘normal’ at least a new kind of normal. But uncertainty and fear for the future remains a reality for many.

When the way forward is unclear... Jesus doesn't promise us that things will be easy, or offer a way out. No, he will die, and they will grieve. But he does promise this most wonderful thing – that he is going ahead of us. Wherever we go; whatever lies ahead – Jesus is already there. Jesus will not leave us to walk alone, but will be with us on the way.

Saint Julian of Norwich, whose feast day it was on Friday, was a rare holy woman of her time. She lived in England in the 1300s and she had visions and mystic encounters with God that she wrote about. In one prayer familiar to many of us, she wrote,

*“All will be well; and all will be well; and all matter of things will be well.”*

I think that's what faith is. It's a deep sense of knowing that no matter what happens next – all will be well – on a deep level. Because Christ has made a home in each of us. And he has prepared a place for us in God's own heart, and nothing can separate us from that relationship.

When we wake up each morning, we don't know what the day will bring. Well, sometimes we do know – sometimes we know what the day is about to bring is going to be hard. But what good does it do for us to live in fear? Jesus says in Matthew: “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” Clearly, no! Worry does not give us life, and in fact it can be toxic. Worry can rob us of the abundant life that God desires for us.

So Jesus encourages us, saying “do not let your hearts be troubled.” Don't let fear overwhelm you. And instead, replace that worry with trust that God will be with us in all things, and that in the end, all will truly be well.

There's something very freeing about trusting that God will make a way – that Jesus is there ahead of us. If we ultimately don't have to worry or fear for the future – then we can be free to go out with good courage. We can also be free to take risks in Jesus' name. To do his work of loving, healing, preaching and feeding.

In the words of Teresa of Avila -

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*“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”*

Why not?! Why not act boldly and risk going outside our comfort zones. Risk giving of our time, risk talking to people we don't know, risk sharing the gospel differently. These are the things Jesus empowers us to do! This is the work that we can accomplish when we don't let fear or anxiety stand in our way.

Jesus is already ahead of us. He's in our aged care rooms. He's in the interview. He's in the oncologist's office. He's at the grave, and beyond. He's already there ahead of you, in whatever uncertain future you can't see right now. He's also ahead of us at St Christopher's – making a way and a future.

And so as we continue on the path--the way--of Christ not knowing where we go, but only that Jesus goes before us we can do so with confidence that all will be well.

The Lord be with you!