

Sunday 10 May 2020

Readings

- Acts 7:55 – end
- John 14:1 – 14

Sermon

I'm going to be focusing today on what Jesus was saying in our second reading. Jesus is at the table with his disciples having just finished celebrating the passover meal. He has just made a number of quite distressing predictions; that one of this group of close friends was going hand him over to the authorities, that he was leaving and that Peter was going to deny even knowing Jesus. Jesus now spends some time comforting his friends.

His reassurance starts with a statement that although he is telling them he will be leaving them, it is not the end. He is going to prepare a place for each of them with God, and he will return to take them to that place. We believe that this is not just a promise to his disciples physically present there, but that it is true for all his followers. Jesus is preparing a place for each

one of us with him in heaven.

This gives us the confidence to know that when we die, it is not the end. It might be the end of our lives here on Earth, but we will end up with Jesus, together with all those that follow Jesus. Not only that, Jesus will lead us to our place. “I will come back” Jesus said. We believe that is a two-fold return, his initial return on Easter day and his final return when he comes to judge the earth. But he has promised that he will return.

Thomas, never the one to hide is uncertainty, wants to make sure that he understands. Jesus has just said (it would be about 10 verses earlier if Jesus actually spoke in verses) “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.” (13:33) Jesus is now saying that he is going to prepare a place for them but if they can't follow where Jesus is going how will they know where that is? So he asks the obvious question “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (v5)

Jesus responds “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (v6) Let's try to unpack those 10 words a bit.

I am the way. To Jews, there were plenty of references to *the way*, meaning the manner in which God wanted them to live their lives. Isaiah says, talking about the desert places “And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.” (Isa 35:8) The way was the way to blessing from God and that was what Jesus was claiming to be.

In his commentary on this passage, William Barclay uses the following illustration that I found useful.

Suppose we are in a strange town and ask for direction. Suppose the person asked says: 'Take the first to the right, and the second to the left. Cross the square, go past the church, take the third on the right and the road you want is the fourth on the left.' The chances are that we will be lost before we get half-way. But suppose the person we ask says:

'Come. I'll take you there.' In that case, the person to us *is* the way, and we cannot miss it. That is what Jesus does for us. He does not only give advice and directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us.

I am the truth. Again, a word that would have meaning to Jews, it would have been recognised as meaning the understanding that was required in order to be able to walk in the Way of God. Psalm 25 includes a passage that includes this idea together with the way. "Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me" (v4,5). Jesus not only leads us in the way that we need to go to get to God, but also teaches us what we need to do in order to follow. But, in a similar manner to with the way, not only does Jesus tell us what we need to do, he embodies what is needed to follow God. His teaching is not "Do as I say, not as I do" but instead "Do as I say and do".

I am the life. This is the reason for knowing the truth and following the way. Obeying God is not an easy option, but it is the only way to receive eternal life. Jesus is telling us that through him

we can receive the same life that he has, a life lived with God at the heart of it. But it goes beyond that with the resurrection. Not only does Jesus show us what a life lived with God here on Earth will look like he also gives us the hope of eternal life lived with God. And that after all was where our passage started.

After this it's Philip's turn for some input. Show us the Father. I wonder whether Jesus felt like pulling his hair out at this point. He had spent the last 3 years with these men and still they come up with comments like this. Jesus then goes on to make it absolutely clear that he is God and that through knowing Jesus the disciples did know God.

He then goes on to say “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (v14). What a promise that is. Of course, it doesn't mean that we just have to add '... in the name of Jesus' at the end of any prayers to guarantee it being answered. Asking in Jesus' name is actually talking about asking on behalf of Jesus, that's not what asking in the name of someone else means. For example, if we were at Christ

Church while I was preaching this, at the end of the service I would wait at the back of church to chat. Often someone will offer me a drink while I wait. If they got to whoever was serving coffee that morning and asked for a milky coffee with 3 sugars and then said they were asking in my name, it wouldn't be true since I can't stand my coffee that way. To really be asking in my name they would have to ask for black coffee with no sugar, since that is what I would have asked for. Asking in someone's name means to ask as though you were that person, to be asking for what they would ask for.

What does this all mean for us? Well, as it was meant for 2000 years ago, it should encourage us when things are difficult. Jesus has not changed. He has gone to prepare a place for us. That is his promise. He will return and when he does he will lead us to the place he has prepared for us. In the meantime we have the confidence that if we are truly searching to pray as he would pray that he is listening and will answer our prayers.