

“Resurrection Life: Jesus Shows Us God”

Psalm 31:1-8; John 14:1-14

A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

Most of you know I worked for the federal government in my “former life.” It’s a big outfit, the federal government, huge really. And in that vast bureaucracy, there would come a time when we’d get a new boss. That experience is one that can cause fear and trepidation in the hearts of any office worker. The old boss, the known quantity, is going away. What will the new guy (or gal) be like? What will they change? What will remain the same? Can we know ahead of time what they are like?

We tried to find out by calling up some people who knew the incoming boss. What they told us alleviated the worry—most of the time. There were a couple of occasions when the “word on the street” was something like: “You’ll just have to see for yourselves.” That usually wasn’t a good omen. I think it happened only twice in my 23 years of service.

Maybe this has happened to you. Maybe you’ve been in a situation where someone you knew well, someone you trusted pretty well, was going away. You knew change was coming. And no matter whether it turned out to be good change, bad change or not much change at all, you still worried at the time.

This morning’s lesson from John is scene that is brimming with worry and anxiety. Jesus has gathered with his disciples for a final meal together. He’s just told them he will be going away, and they will not be able to see him or be with him anymore. He tries to calm their fears: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” He goes on to tell them about the place he’s going to prepare for them in his “Father’s house,” and about how they will follow one day (but not right now).

It doesn’t do much good. The disciples are still worried; they are afraid for the future, for what will come next. You can tell that from the questions that follow:

- From Thomas: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”
- And from Philip: “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

Anxiety. Fear. Worry. Yes, the disciples experienced all these emotions on that last night with Jesus.

What did Jesus do to alleviate their fears? He gave them what they needed most; Jesus showed them the Father. He did it by telling them to believe; believe: In God and in Jesus, and believe in the place Jesus was preparing for them.

Believe in God. When Jesus told the disciples to “Believe in God, believe also in me,” he wasn’t just saying “believe in your head” all the things you’ve been taught about God. That kind of believing is good because it give us knowledge about God’s nature, and character, and the history of God and humankind.

But it doesn’t go far enough. The knowledge of God, if it remains only an intellectual exercise, doesn’t do us any good. What we need to really know God is heart knowledge, and heart language, the language of love.

It has to be the kind of experience of God that moves our whole being: mind, body, soul, spirit, and yes, heart. Jesus was speaking to their hearts: “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” he said. Not your mind, or your will, or your hand, but your heart.

In ancient Israel, people believed the heart was the location of a person’s very being. It was their center.

Everything—emotion, will, thinking, understanding—all of this resided in the heart.¹

¹ “Heart,” in Mark Allan Powell, General Editor, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, Revised and Updated*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 368.

Today, we know this isn't so. Physiologically speaking, the brain is the place where most of this action is. But we still preserve the idea when we say things like: "Follow your heart," or "my heart is overjoyed." When we talk like this, we're speaking from the center of who we are.

Believing in God takes the kind of commitment that comes from believing in your heart—your very essence—that God is God. There's a saying that kind of gets at this level of commitment, I'm sure you've heard it before: "You can hang your hat on it."

Martin Luther, one of the great Protestant Reformers, included a comment in his Large Catechism about the First Commandment (You shall have no other Gods before me); his comment goes like this: What does it mean to have a God? Luther's answer was "God is what you hang your heart on."²

I like that. I think Jesus is saying the same thing. Trust God with all your heart—all that you are—and trust Jesus, because Jesus and the Father are one. "Believe in God, believe also in me."

Believe in the place Jesus is preparing. One of the things the disciples were anxious about was losing Jesus. That is to say, Jesus told them he was leaving and they couldn't go with him. But he promised he was going in order to prepare a place for them.

Jesus employed the language of space and location here:

In my Father's house there are many **dwelling-places**...I go to prepare a **place** for you...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. And you know the way to the **place** where I am going. (John 14:2-4)

Where was this place, the disciples wanted to know? How could they get there? Jesus told them he is "the way and the truth and the life." The way to the Father is through Jesus.

I believe we need to hear Jesus' words about the place he is going to and preparing for his followers on two levels:

In one sense, Jesus is talking about going to heaven when he is gone. By doing so, by suffering and dying on the Cross, he will open the way to his Father's house where there is room aplenty for all who believe in him. The place Jesus prepares for us in heaven is where we will live with God until the Day of Resurrection; then, God will call forth a new heaven and a new earth; they will become one "place," one space where God is present with God's beloved Creation—restored, healed, and made whole—resurrected to remain so for eternity with God. So, this is one sense in which we can understand the "place" Jesus is preparing. He's talking about heaven. The other sense Jesus is talking about is to think of place as relationship with God. Let's remember, the disciples have just spent three years with Jesus. They've been with him day and night, eating with him, traveling with him, being taught by him, praying with him, and being amazed by his miracles. They didn't want that to end. After all this time, they didn't want their relationship with him to be broken. So, they thought of their relationship with Jesus in terms of being in the same space.

- We have similar desires. We want to be with the ones we love, physically, in the same place. Absence may make the heart grow fonder, as the old saying goes, but there's still nothing like being in the same house, the same room, as your beloved. We prefer our relationships to be up close and personal.
- I think that's really the disciples' question here. How do you maintain a relationship with Jesus when he's no longer here on earth? "Where are you going, Jesus? How can we find the way to you?"

There's a song from the musical *Oliver* that I think captures this longing for relationship with someone. It, too, talks about relationship in spatial terms. The name of the song is, "Where is Love," and the lyrics go like this:

Where is love?

² Robert Jenson, "Aspects of a Doctrine of Creation," in Colin Gunton, ed., *The Doctrine of Creation*, (London: T&T Clark, 1997), 24; quoted in Cynthia A. Jarvis, "John 14:1-14, Homiletical Perspective, in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2, Lent through Eastertide*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 497

Does it come from skies above?
Is it underneath the willow tree,
That I've been dreaming of?
Where is she?
Whom I close my eyes to see?
Will I ever know, the sweet hello
That's meant for only me?
Who can say where she may hide?
Must I travel far and wide?
Till I am beside the someone who,
I can mean something to?
Where, where is love?³

In this song, change the “she” in the song to “he” and you have humankind’s search for God. Here we have: The longing and the desire to be loved by someone beyond us, the search for the “place” where we can be loved, and the goal, to find “the someone who, we can mean, something to.”

That someone is Jesus, who meets us in loving relationship with a loving heavenly Father, and who promises (though not in this chapter) to remain with us through the Holy Spirit: God is the place where we find love, Jesus is the Way, the Holy Spirit is the constant presence of God’s love with us.

And the God we see is revealed through a home, a dwelling place, prepared for us, for all God’s family. Welcome home. Welcome to God’s family.

Beloved, we are all subject to the fear of what the future might hold. That’s especially true right now as we are holed-up in our homes, doing our best to avoid the effects of the pandemic. But more than just during a pandemic, whatever worries or fears or anxieties we may have, Jesus calls to us, and asks us to trust him and to trust his Father, the God who is revealed to us in Jesus. Jesus shows us God. He shows us by the things he did: He healed the sick, Cast out demons, welcomed the outcasts, and demanded justice for the poor and the vulnerable.

On that last night with his disciples: He ate a meal with his friends (“I no longer call you servants,” he told them, “I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” [John 15:15]); He washed their feet, even the feet of those who betrayed him and would desert him; He forgave them. This is the way, the truth and the life in God.

If you want to know the way to God, look to Jesus; you will find God there in his life of humility, of justice, of mercy and of love.

My friends, think about the way Jesus is showing God to you this week.

- Be assured of God’s love—it’s perfectly revealed to us in Jesus, who gave his life that we might have eternal life.
- Do something this week to deepen your relationship with God. Say some prayers, read a part of the Bible you haven’t read before, or one you haven’t read in a long time. Look up a devotional online and see how God is inspiring others to write of God’s love.
- Pray and meditate on the love Jesus shows us. He is the someone who, we mean so much to.

Amen.

³ “Where is Love?” Source: Musixmatch; written by: Lionel Bart; Lyrcs copyright T.R.O. INC., Lyrics licensed & Provided by LyricFind, article on internet, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/3270758/Hollywood+Musicals+%5BLife+Times+%26+Music%5D/Where+Is+Love%3F+%5BFrom+Oliver%21%5D>, accessed 8 May 2020.