

The Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 10, 2020

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Promise and Presence for Troubled Times

John 14:1–6

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Jesus said, “**In My Father’s house are many rooms. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also. . . . I AM the way, the truth, and the life**” (vv 2, 3, 6). These are His promises for us today.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus speaks with His disciples. He has spoken to them of what lies ahead. The future is frightening: “**One of you will betray Me**” (Jn 13:21); “**Where I am going you cannot come**” (Jn 13:33); to Peter, “**You will deny Me three times**” (cf. Jn 13:38). Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. They were living through troubled times—troubled times for followers of Jesus, for the Church, for the world.

In troubled times or when we see trouble on the horizon, we try to prepare by asking questions. We want as much information as we can get. Give me the details. Give me charts and graphs and expert analysis. The disciples are no different. Peter wants to know *exactly* where Jesus is going (Jn 13:26). Thomas makes the case that they need to know more if they’re going to follow Him (v 6). They want specific times and places. The disciples look for comfort in the details, in a clear set of directions to follow, just as we try to cling to numbers and probabilities and timelines and educated guesses. How else are we to navigate whatever might come? How else can we live through troubled times?

Looking around at their fearful and terrified eyes, Jesus says, “**Let not your hearts be troubled** by any of that or by what’s going to happen to Me or to you. **Believe in God; believe also in Me**” (v 1). Simply put, “Trust God; trust Me, too.” He isn’t telling us to ignore guidelines and orders and the information out there. But He *is* telling us that we shouldn’t place our ultimate trust in such things. Our real hope isn’t in projections or face masks or social distancing. No matter how many details we gather, we’ll never have perfect knowledge to guide us through, and that’s especially true of the valley of the shadow of death.

So Jesus offers something else. He gives them a promise. He comforts them with His presence. This promise and His presence are for you, too.

What promise does Jesus give? His promise is He is working on their behalf. **“In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it weren’t so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also”** (vv 2–3). Jesus doesn’t provide many details. His words probably create even more questions. So what do we make of these words? It’s not that the future with Jesus is murky or abstract or intangible. This is no pie-in-the-sky promise or castle in the clouds. The thing is that the future with Jesus is *so* bright and *so* solid and *so* real. How would you describe a world of color to people who live in black-and-white? Or the four dimensions of time-and-space to a two-dimensional chalk figure? That’s what it would be like if Jesus tried to tell the disciples and us more about His Father’s house, about the kingdom of glory. You’ve simply got to see it!

Jesus tells us as much as we need to know. And what do we need to know? There’s enough room for each and every one of us. He’s preparing it for us. And He’ll come again to take us there. That’s the promise of His return in glory.

But Thomas throws up his hands in confusion and exasperation and asks for more. Jesus moves from this promise to His presence. He says to Thomas, **“I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life”** (v 6). Jesus sees His disciples facing future uncertainty, and He responds not with details about dates and times and procedures to follow, but with His promise and His presence. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Notice that Jesus doesn’t give them a bunch of instructions or a list of things to do. This future doesn’t depend on what the disciples do. It doesn’t depend on their faithfulness. It isn’t something they earn by their obedience. Promises are received by faith, not by works. It all rests on the shoulders of Jesus.

The disciples may not know where they are going, but, as long as they are with Jesus, they know they are on the way. *We* certainly don’t know where we are going, at least not in the near future, but we have the same certainty. So long as we are with Jesus, we, too, know we’re on the way—on the way to the Father’s house, to the place prepared for us. The way forward is long and hard. It will have twists and turns. It will go through suffering, sorrow, and death. So remember what He says, **“I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life”** (v 6).

With His promises to comfort us and His presence to guide us, we can face the uncertain future. **“Let not your hearts be troubled,”** Jesus says. **“Believe in God; believe also in Me** (v 1). Whatever happens, I am there with you.”

In His death and resurrection, Jesus shows you the depth of His love. In His ascension into heaven, He shows you the breadth of His rule. You don't know what's going to happen, but you do know where you are—in the hands of a God who loves. Love caused His incarnation. Love drove Him to the cross. Love made Him stronger than death and the grave. Love led Him to promise that He will return for you. His way is long enough that it leads through all suffering. His truth is clear enough that it reveals whom to trust. His life is strong enough that it overcame death.

With Jesus as our way, our truth, and our life, we have enough for today, for tomorrow, and for eternity.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
