

Fifth Sunday of Easter May 7 2023

John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In 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? ³And 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.

⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

⁶Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” ⁹Jesus said to him, Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father ? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

¹²Very 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. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

SERMON

“Don’t lose heart”—That’s a tall order when you know the religious police and the Roman army are gunning for your leader—and for you too maybe. How does a group avoid losing heart when one among them has already bailed to the other side and it looks like a key leader is about to disavow the core person around whom everything is built.

Don't lose heart- That's a tall order for a group of people, like those first hearers of John's Gospel who were estranged from their community—we don't know for sure if they walked out or were thrown out—the alienation sticks either way. That's a kind of death.

There's no "Norman Vincent Peeling" our way out with positive thinking against the brokenness that plagues us even now. Recently after worship, someone remarked to me that you can't have resurrection if nothing has died. The person wanted to soften the blow and said, "I know that's radical". That's when the word nerd literalist in me took over. Radical means root. Resurrection's roots intertwine into death. Put another way, what good is resurrection if there isn't death first?

We tell each other not to lose heart. Professor Angela Parker teaches Greek and New Testament at Mercer University in Atlanta. She tells us that when Jesus is preparing his followers for his death, he speaks plural to everyone, yet there's one heart—don't lose that! Professor Parker encourages us to embody resurrection to be people of the way. I find myself praying for her in the aftermath of a mass shooting in her home city this week. Colleague preacher and now US Senator Rev. Dr. Raphael Warnock grimly put it out there saying, "No one is safe."

Jesus speaks into the reality of death..I AM...Anytime Jesus says I AM he speaks into our literal way of taking things or our limited view of God—any time Jesus speaks the words I AM we're reminded of God's word to Moses, who asks the name of the Holy One...God speaks with the sound of breath...I AM.

Jesus words open things up and embrace everything and everyone...they don't confine, exclude or constrict...I AM the way, the truth and the life, Jesus says.

There's no easy roadmap or strategic plan—There's Jesus promising himself and promising resurrection—promising God's presence in life, in death, and in those places where life and death collide.

Not all death is “call the undertaker” death. Relationships can die...communities can die...the way we think the world is or should be can die—God brings resurrection there too.

The church of the 1950's with its booming attendance has already died. The post pandemic church feels fragile. It would be a fool's errand to try to turn back the clock or pretend everything will return to our version of “normal”. As my friend Valerie liked to say, “If you want normal look at the dial on your clothes washer”.

We want “normal” ...naturally. Jesus who says I AM gives us himself...he gives resurrection...and will be for us and all creation Way Truth and Life.