
From: Northwest Presbyterian Church
Sent: Saturday, May 9, 2020 10:50 PM
To: Kris Parks
Subject: A Sermon by Pastor Elizabeth Coleman

Fifth Sunday of Easter
“You Know the Way”
Northwest Presbyterian Church
May 10, 2020

Happy Mother’s Day to all mothers! May God richly bless and keep you, as you have been a blessing to those whom you have nurtured.

Lectionary Readings:

Acts 7:55-60
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16
1 Peter 2:2-10

Gospel Text: John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In 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? 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.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Phillip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Phillip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father? Do 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. Believe 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. Very 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. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”
(NRSV)

Sermon:

The way is unexpected. The disciples of Jesus had walked with him for three years, had listened to his teaching, and had witnessed his miraculous healings. Still, they expected him to be the kind of Messiah who would restore the earthly kingdom to Israel, and defeat the oppressive Roman Empire. They expected their savior to rescue them from human oppression.

But Jesus was telling them in our gospel passage for today that he was a very different kind of Savior. They would indeed be redeemed, but it would be by the blood, suffering, and crucifixion of Jesus, not by a victorious physical battle.

The disciples thought as many people today think — in concrete human terms that are based in the tangible, physical realm of existence. Spiritual warfare and spiritual deliverance were not as familiar to them. Jesus sought to expand their spiritual awareness through this dialogue that began with a calming of their anxieties. Step by step, Jesus revealed to them the basics about the afterlife. He would go before them to prepare a place for them. Then, he would come back to take them to that prepared dwelling place.

The disciples had many questions for Jesus, because they were trying to understand spiritual concepts within a physical, human framework. This doesn't work. Everything about the tangible earthly realm, as we perceive it as human beings, has limitations, and the transcendent nature of the spiritual realm cannot be limited in that way.

Perhaps that is why God reveals to us God's will in increments. We usually receive guidance in small bites. As we complete one part of our mission, God reveals to us the next step. It is often only in hindsight that we recognize what God was doing in our lives. As we take each step, we grow spiritually, and our understanding is expanded. Only then can we even conceive of some of the ways that God will work through us to accomplish His will.

Jesus said that he would come back to take us to live with him and the Father forever. He is preparing a dwelling place for us who believe in him. He said that we know the way to get there. Jesus is the way.

It is easy to see how the disciples would be perplexed about how they were going to get to the place where Jesus was going. They had walked along the dusty roads from Galilee to Jerusalem with Jesus. He had led them, and they had felt safe with

him. But now, Jesus was talking about going away to the Father. They were beginning to fear abandonment, and the reality of their lack of expertise in this world's ways was becoming clearer to them. After all, they were fishermen, tax collectors and ordinary citizens, not rabbis.

As Jesus had told them many times before, he admonished them to not be afraid. He explained how he was one with the Father, and how he also was the image of the Father. ("If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.")

Jesus called his disciples to faith. By believing in Jesus, the disciples would be able to do the works that Jesus did, and even greater works, because Jesus was going to the Father. Jesus promised his disciples that he would do anything that they asked him to do in his name. These were incredible promises, and it took some time for the disciples to wrap their minds around them. It was not until Pentecost that they fully understood the power of these words, because they needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to truly operate in the way that Jesus intended.

So, how is Jesus the way home to the Father? Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is the presence of God in Jesus and in us. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we receive the essence of the Holy Trinity within ourselves. This Spirit of God is how Jesus and the Father are present within us. It is the Holy Spirit who guides us home to be with the Father and Jesus at our appointed time. We know the way, because we have within us the One who is the way.

In our current collective experience, we have been lifting our prayers to God. We know that God is listening, and we have expectations about how the answer to our prayers will look. Today's gospel is a reminder that followers of Jesus Christ are often surprised by the unexpected ways in which God answers our prayers. We may look for tangible answers, but there may be spiritual gifts that God has planned for us. We may long to interface with the physical Jesus as his disciples did, and ask him questions or touch the hem of his garment for healing.

If we would elevate our expectations to include the honing of spiritual gifts and talents, long-term spiritual growth, and the virtue of patience as real answers to our prayers, this might bring a clearer understanding of the vast array of possibilities from which God may choose what is best for us.

We cannot yet fully understand all of the reasons why we are experiencing life as we do right now. The one constant that we can rely on is God's love for us,

through which we have salvation and eternal life. In the end, nothing else really matters. Amen.