

Living into Christ's Promise

1 Peter 2:2-10

Crossroads Christian Church

John 14:1-14

May 18, 2014 Easter 5A

One semester back in college, many long years ago, I and a group of other male students started to grow beards late in the semester and into finals week. The rationale was that it would impress the professors that we were too busy studying to bother with shaving. I'm sure that the shagginess of our faces didn't have a positive influence on our grades, but it was fun anyway. Itchy, but fun.

Finals week always had a big impact on our lives—especially if we didn't study enough. It created enough tension that we who are senior citizens will still have nightmares about being ushered into a classroom, being given blue books, and then receiving a test for a subject that was completely foreign to us.

Our Gospel lesson wasn't quite like finals week, but it was like the week before finals, when the teacher Jesus was preparing his students for the tests and trials that were to come. The cross would be their final exam. How would they compare and contrast their dreams of God's Messiah coming to set all things right with the reality of a suffering servant, humiliated and tortured, hanging on a cross?

The Gospel of John gives four chapters, 13-17, to Jesus preparing the disciples for his death and resurrection. The section begins with the disciples and Jesus gathered for the Last Supper, and Jesus giving the disciples an object lesson by washing their feet. Their teacher and master was acting like their most menial servant, and saying that they should do the same for one another. Then he had announced that one of them would betray him. Then he had given them the Love Commandment: "Love each other as I have loved you." Finally, when Peter promised to follow him faithfully and bravely, Jesus told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crows. We've already watched and discussed some of these passages in our Wednesday evening Lenten Bible studies, including the one we just saw a few minutes ago. The words are familiar. We often associate them with funerals, because they are words of great promise. They are words of eternal life.

With the words he speaks, Jesus tries to completely reframe their situation and the way that they perceived their situation. To them, everything seemed ready to fall apart. All the wonderful things that Jesus had done, all the wonderful things that Jesus had said, all the wonderful things that Jesus had taught them to do and say, were being put to the ultimate test. How could all they had learned about God's love stand up to the power of the Temple, the power of the high priests, the power of the Roman Governor, the power of the legions? A sense of doom hung in the air, thicker than the smoke of the oil lamps. They were troubled; deeply troubled; and they had every right to be.

In that setting, Jesus said, "Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me." Would God really save them, they had wondered. Would Jesus really get them through this, they had asked themselves. And Jesus was saying, Yes. God will really save you. Yes. Jesus will get you through all this. Everything felt like death to them; but Jesus was reminding them that the power of life was stronger. Yes, Jesus would die. Yes, eventually they would all die. But Jesus knew that for them, for us, death wasn't going to be the end. The road that they were on, the road that we are on, isn't just the road to death; it is the road through death to life with God. Jesus described it in these words: "My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I'm going."

The Jewish authorities and the Roman judges could take their earthly lives, but no one could cancel their reservations for suites in their Father's house. He was going to leave them, this is true. But, his leaving—his death—was to prepare a place for them; to get things ready; and then he would come back for them and take them to home; their heavenly home.

Of course, in John's Gospel, Jesus is always talking at this level, and the disciples are always trying to make sense of it down here, at this level—literally. Thomas thinks that Jesus is about to make a trip down the road somewhere, and says, "But we don't know where you're going? Which way are we to follow?"

And Jesus gives him one of those I Am statements that we looked at in our Lenten Bible studies. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him."

Of course, we affirm that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, because we know him, and trust him, and follow him. There's a lot of debate about "no one comes to the Father except through me." Many would say that Christianity is the only true religion, and that if you don't become a Christian, you won't go to the Father. Others say that what God did through Jesus, and his death and resurrection, opens the way to heaven to all people who live lives of goodness and love—it's what Jesus did, not what we do, that make the difference, that allows us to come to God through Jesus, whether or not we have known him on this earth.

But let's get back to the flow of the text. Phillip says, Lord show us the Father; that will be enough for us! Show us the Father! What a wonderful and audacious request! Keep in mind that even Moses didn't see God face to face; and many, like Isaiah, who had a vision of God, were terrified, and afraid they would die. But Phillip had learned enough to trust in Jesus, and that Jesus could show him the Father.

But Jesus took Phillip a step farther. As you have seen me, you have seen the Father. Looking at Jesus is looking at God, because God dwells in Jesus and Jesus dwells in God. Seeing the works of Jesus: healing; forgiving; raising people from the dead; these are all the works of God. And Phillip, Thomas, and the rest of the disciples, and Christians to come, will be able to continue these works because of Jesus being glorified. Being glorified refers to Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection—the Son of God being lifted up.

We have a destination—our Father's place—and there's plenty of room there. We know what the God who meets us there will be like, because we have seen God in the life, ministry, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was trying to convince the disciples that they weren't at the end of the road, but at the beginning of a new journey. He was helping

them, even during their last few hours together, to live into what his whole ministry had been about.

Becoming a Christian, like getting married, isn't the end a journey, it's the beginning. Jesus helped his disciples live into what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, to understand a whole new vision of a loving God who invites us into a living relationship. Jesus invites us to live into that same relationship.

1 Peter 2 builds on this. We are living stones, built into a new temple of God, and Jesus is the cornerstone. And we're not just living stones, but "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession." We are chosen by God to spread his love; we are priests, drawing other people closer to God; we are God's own people, not just because God loves us and doesn't like anybody else, but because God chooses us to use us; to live into God's love as we journey on this earth.

So, we're on a journey of faith. Like all good road movies, that journey will lead us through bad times and good times, through tears and laughter; but as we journey, we will change. We will grow into what it means to live out the love of Jesus in our lives. We know who walks with us—the living Christ. And we know where we're going to; our Father's House with plenty of love, with plenty of joy, with plenty of rooms. Room for you, room for me. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon

Invitation to prayer: As we come to prayer, let us hear the words of Psalm 62. "On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in God at all times, O people; pour out your heart before the Holy One; God is a refuge to us." Let us sing our hymn of prayer.

Prayer (revgalpals Terri) Holy God, we give you thanks for the gift of life, especially for the gift of your Son, the Christ, the Word, the way, the truth, who expands our limited understanding with outstretched arms of love.

Holy God, we pray that you be present with those the suffering from storms or floods, from draught, wind, or any of the forces of creation that seek to break down your creation and destroy the work of your hand.

Holy God, we pray that you will bring comfort to those afflicted, the sick, and those who have died.

Embrace them in your hand, hold them tenderly, like a mother her child, like a father his infant, like a friend cares for another.

Holy God, we ask that you so fill our hearts, our minds, our spirits, with your love and compassion that we can be your hand, your heart in the world.

Amen.

Communion: "Jesus, show us God the Father," was Philip's plea. Jesus responded, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." How often we fail to see the Truth standing before our very eyes! Like at this table: We frequently see the bread, see the cup, see the body broken and drink of salvation poured...but nothing else. We seem blinded to the Truth standing in our presence, the Living Presence of the Risen Christ among us. May God help us see that the living God, the living Christ, is right here, in our sisters' and brothers' faces, and in our own hearts. Let us sing our hymn of communion.