

May 10, 2020
Bide the Time
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John 14:1-14

[Jesus the Way to the Father]

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.”*

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” ⁹ Jesus 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’? ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

One evening in November, when it’s dark by 5:00, I left work and ran by Target for something on the way home. I was sitting at the light next to the Chick-Fil-A, in the far right lane to go straight across Third Street, when suddenly a white pickup truck was spinning in circles right in front of my car and slammed broadside into the car next to me in the left turn lane. Everything in the truck bed spilled on top of the little Honda. The truck kept spinning until it came to rest in the grass of the Chick-Fil-A. It was terrifying.

I was positive he’d run the red light and suspected he was drunk. To get out of the way I had to cross Third Street but I went around the block and went back, in case the police wanted witnesses. The Honda and the pickup truck were in the Fifth Third Bank parking lot. I talked to the woman in the Honda. She said she was fine. And that the man driving the pickup was really shaken but not hurt either.

“I’m worried about her though,” she said, pointing to the street. There was a very young Indian woman standing by the back door of her car, talking to her toddler in a car seat.

She was a hysterical mess, because she was the one who'd tried to make the light. The truck had the arrow, and she slammed into him as he turned, sending him spinning. Her car was still in the road; cars were laying on their horns for her to move. She was crying so hard she could barely breathe. And the toddler was refusing to get out of her car seat.

Two things about myself quickly became clear: First, when the danger is low, I excel in a crisis. I hugged the mom and let her cry on me a minute. I then held her firmly by the shoulders and said, *The other drivers can just deal with it. Ignore them. But the baby can't stay there. It's dangerous.* Then I got the kid out of the car seat and we sat on the curb. The mama cried and we sang songs until Daddy and the police arrived. Then I went home.

The second thing I learned, and I am not proud of this: I was grateful she was a hysterical mess, because it gave me something to do. Without something to do, I'd have gone home with nothing but the embarrassment of having been arrogantly, pridefully wrong. I truly was certain I knew exactly what had happened at that intersection. I knew whose fault it was. I actually said to myself, "I should go back in case they need a witness of that guy's recklessness." When in fact, as facts go, I saw nothing at all.

Our text today comes from Jesus's farewell discourse, at the table of his last supper together with the disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. The dinner had already been weird. Judas walked out. Peter made a scene about dying for Jesus. And Jesus said, "Yeah, no." Maybe the wine bottle goes around the table again. Maybe they drift to other subjects. But eventually Jesus begins to speak again, and he says,

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house, there are many places to abide. 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."

And however much they don't mean to, or want to, or know they shouldn't, his friends cannot resist asking for more. I wonder if we don't live in similar times, knowing we are supposed to be more faithful than we are, resisting (or maybe not) the temptation to ask for more from God than God seems to want to give these days.

Let's pray: *We want more faith, O God. We also ask for your guarantees before we will put our hearts out. We are deaf to our own hypocrisy and blind to your goodness. Goodness that has brought us this far. As you and the Father are one, let us be one with you, fear- lessly sure you are here, and now. Amen.*

As Jesus and his disciples sat around that table, a cohort of soldiers is gathered in an armory somewhere else in the same city, suiting up, anticipating resistance when they go to arrest Jesus. As it turned out – and not surprisingly, given his *I will gladly die for you* speech – one of Jesus's own, Simon Peter, is the first to draw blood. I wonder how

knowing those soldiers were out there played in Jesus's mind, as his followers at that table asked him again to please show them the Father, so they would be satisfied enough to believe the things he said. I wonder if Jesus ever got discouraged, and especially there, near the end of his incarnation, when literally nobody seems to have a clue what his mission was.

He's going away to prepare a place and coming back to get them. He needs them to believe he will do what he says he will do. And yet, all they seem to know how to do is argue. *But where are you going? We don't know the way. Please, just show us the Father. Then we will be satisfied. Then we can do what you ask.*

As John tells it, Jesus doesn't even blink, let alone smack his own forehead in frustration. He starts over. At this late hour (the soldiers, remember) he starts over, "*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. I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.*"

In the time that he has, in as many ways as he can say it, Jesus brings them back to what they have seen and what they have heard. Hopefully the irony isn't lost on us. Phillip is asking Jesus to show him the Father after Jesus tells him *I and the Father are one* – Jesus ever so gently telling them to notice what they are looking at now, to remember what they have seen and heard while with him.

A friend with two little boys told me that regularly at supper the little one will ask, with his mouth full of food, "Mom, what are we having for bedtime snack?" Who among us hasn't done the same? Worried that what we already have won't be enough for what we might need later? Searched and longed for what was right in front of us but didn't measure up to some expectation born of fear and anxiety? Or assumed what we saw was all there was to see, like the car wreck last fall, about which I was so very, very wrong?

Show us the Father, Phillip says, and truly believes he hasn't seen Him – because his heart isn't ready to see Him. His heart isn't ready to let go of everything he has to let go of to see the Father right in front of him. The disciples around that table with Jesus imagine that foreknowing will make the future easier to bear, that it will make faith easier to muster. No, it won't. It only tricks us into believing we are in control of things that cannot be controlled.

It's the bane of quarantine, isn't it? This not-knowing, in which we only get to know what will happen today. Not knowing is a loss to people like us: people with plans to make, calendars to fill. We can manage a week or two or three. But after a month, we start feeling a little offended, a little put out. We find language we didn't think we had, about necessary risks and necessary sacrifices, as if being told we must bide these times, is some brand new suggestion to the human race and to people of faith in particular.

To bide our time is to do the very act of faith Jesus calls forth from his unborn church gathered around this table in John 10. His part is about to be complete, then their part will begin. In between they abide; they stay in one place and believe that what God needs doing is getting done without them. And when they are needed, they will be summoned. *I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.*

Jesus even says that the work they will do will be even greater than what they saw him do. Which, in volume, was true – but I bet it was hard to imagine when he said it. It's that indefinite in-between that we hate so much, isn't it? And God's reluctance to share details – details we would argue about, even if God did share them. That gets us crazy. Friends, during a pandemic or not, the same is true. We can't know tomorrow. We can pretend we do. But that's all we are doing. Pretending. And squandering the joy that is to be had in this moment.

Here and now is the time to know God with us, keeping us, carrying us, loving us in everything that is good, kind, and graceful. Abundance, remember. We don't have to worry or be afraid. All of God we need, we have. Right here. Right now. But we shall only see and hear and find, by resisting the temptation to be elsewhere, embracing the gift of abiding, each moment, each day, in faith.

For our closing prayer, I want to read a few lines from *The Tao of Healing*. The meaning of "tao" is way or path – *The Path of Healing*.

Quiet the mind

Be still

And watch the breath of God

Rise and fall in all things.

Allow God's breath to be your breath;

Allow God's nature to be your nature.

The nature of God is to love and be loved;

Your desire to love creates intention

Intention focuses attention

Attention illuminates understanding

Understanding manifests forgiveness

Forgiveness is the fountainhead of love.

Intend to be Love

And know death for what it is:

The in-breath of God.

Amen.