

Getting Directions

For a passage that begins so beautifully, there have been many troubling things which have come from the way that passage has been viewed by some and used by others since it was written not long after our Lord went to prepare that place for us by dying on a cross. In the current situation we find ourselves, what is found in John chapter 14: verses 1 and 2 are truly words to hold close. These words are very familiar to us for we often hear them and find them profoundly comforting in the face of the death of a loved one when it occurs as it will sometime in all of our lives. In the midst of a world-wide pandemic where the statistics about death are so overwhelming and heard so often, the need to hold onto the promises found here becomes urgent. As we are immersed in the news of the pain and suffering caused by the disease, the hardships caused in the aftermath of trying to reduce the spread of the disease, the mental, emotional stress and anxiety prevalent within us and those around us, the number of people who are living marginalized lives within an abundant society, and so much other bad news also has become evident, so it is hard for our hearts not to be troubled. One of our problems with this text has always been that we make the same mistake that the first disciples made and taken the words too literally. In our case, we have made them solely about the promise of eternal life, the life after death which is spoken of when Jesus speaks of his Ascension, of his returning to the Father. Jesus does clearly say that at some point there will be a place there for his disciples, but actually the text also speaks very clearly about our lives here and now and how we are to live them because Jesus was very concerned throughout his entire ministry about bringing God's reign near—God's kingdom to earth. You only need to recall the opening of the prayer that he taught them to see that he wanted them to focus on this goal—thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. At this point in what is termed Jesus' farewell address to these his closest friends, knowing what is going to occur, Jesus is concerned to reassure them that despite appearances, he is not going to abandon them. Jesus calls them back to this fundamental relationship of trust and assures them that although he is returning to the Father, this is actually good news for them for that will also be their final destination. Jesus tells them "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." In the disciples mind, this takes the form of a physical place where Jesus is going, a location on a map so to speak. They begin to try to understand exactly where this location is and how to get there, so when Jesus tells them that they know the way to this place where Jesus is going, Thomas speaks up and says to him: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" At this point in the farewell address, the disciples truly do not understand that they are only hours away from Jesus' betrayal, trial and death. They really do not know where his path is leading, but Jesus' response to Thomas indicates that the way to where he is going—the way to the Father is found in the way that he has been traveling all along, the way that he has been teaching them to follow. Jesus' response to Thomas is: "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 response clearly shows that he still is in the dark about this as he asks to be shown the Father. Jesus then goes on to again explain that he and the Father dwell within each other and

that he does the works of the Father, and that those who believe will also do the works of that he and the Father do. Somehow, like those first disciples we tend to overlook the connection which is here; the one that Jesus is making to the way that the disciples have been shown through their time with Jesus that Jesus is the one dwelling in that special relationship with the Father demonstrating God's self and revealing God's purpose. Here Jesus reminds them he came to demonstrate what the reign of God on earth would look like; that through their journey with him through Galilee they should have seen glimpses of God's kingdom, and therefore know that his way of love, of treating others, of being obedient to the commandments of God, not necessarily those of the priestly class are the true way to the Father's reign and bringing God's kingdom to earth so that life abundant will be found. Those early believers, those who first claimed to be followers of the risen Jesus did not call themselves Christian. They called themselves followers of The Way, and by that they meant that they were ones who followed the ways of the rabbi, the teacher who wandered the Galilean country side and had taught them to live according to a particular set of teachings. These teachings were about compassion, about mutual care within community, about actions which healed and restored, about fundamental respect for each person within the community. All the things which Jesus was known to have taught to the crowds who gathered and followed him which he said were examples of how the reign of God looked. This instruction that Jesus was the way was never meant to be a way of exclusion which many have tried to use it, but a way to open up and reveal what God had always intended—that God's reign would prevail on all the earth. For God so loved the world that he sent his son, to reveal to us what the reign of God on earth would look like. Jesus told his followers he did not come to abolish or change God's law, he came to fulfill it. Jesus told his followers to love one another as he had loved them. If we are to be his disciples, this is the way that we follow Jesus, and this is the way to the Father. Jesus is the way—the place where we find our directions for living. And yes, then our hearts will not be troubled and we can be sure that there will be dwelling places prepared for us. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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