

The Road

14¹⁻⁴ "Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live. And you already know the road I'm taking."

⁵ Thomas said, "Master, we have no idea where you're going. How do you expect us to know the road?"

⁶⁻⁷ Jesus said, "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him. You've even seen him!"

⁸ Philip said, "Master, show us the Father; then we'll be content."

⁹⁻¹⁰ "You've been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don't understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, 'Where is the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren't mere words. I don't just make them up on my own. The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act.

¹¹⁻¹⁴ "Believe me: I am in my Father and my Father is in me. If you can't believe that, believe what you see—these works. The person who trusts me will not only do what I'm doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I've been doing. You can count on it. From now on, whatever you request along the lines of who I am and what I am doing, I'll do it. That's how the Father will be seen for who he is in the Son. I mean it. Whatever you request in this way, I'll do.

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John 14:1-14 – Jesus’ Departure Narrative series

“Trust Me and Do My Work”

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For the next 5 weeks, I plan to preach from the departure narratives in John’s gospel – which are found in chapters 14 through 17. This is Jesus’ *long* good-bye, and it’s only found here. In the other gospels, you get a little bit of foreshadowing in the stories warning you that something bad is going down for Jesus, but nothing quite like this. Here, Jesus is doing some serious monologuing. If we were watching these chapters as a play, Jesus would be in the spotlight with the disciples listening in the shadows. He **IS** talking to them – but it is also true that John, the writer of this gospel, invites us to listen as though Jesus is talking directly to us – the modern-day readers. It’s also only in this version of the Jesus story that we get inside of Jesus’ head in the garden of Gethsemane where he prays to the Father about all these things he’s just said to his disciples. That will be the reading at the end of the series on Trinity Sunday June 11. So I invite you, at home, to get familiar with these four chapters of scripture. It’s not a lot of required reading – and I think you will find that you – like me – will find some fascinating points of engagement if you allow Jesus to speak this good-bye directly to you. As we go along, be sure to tell me your stories! I’d love to hear how this brief section of scripture speaks to you.

To say just a few more words in the way of set up – another way to imagine this portion of scripture is as Jesus’ charges to and blessing of his disciples. I’ve said more than a few times when I’ve taught lessons on why we worship the way we do that the “Sending” is the most important part of the service. At least I think that how we worship should all lead up to that. We gather as a community, we sing, we confess, we forgive, we read scripture and listen to an

interpretation of scripture for today, we pray, we sing some more, we break bread, we offer thanks, and then we SEND people out into the world to live their lives of Christian faith. If we think that Sunday worship is all we need to do to be followers of Christ, we would be sadly mistaken. Worship is just the preparation, the getting fired up for all the things that we're going to do the rest of the week. When it comes to the end of the service, we should have that sense that we have been charged to go forth and do something. Go therefore, and _____ (fill in the blank). And, trust me, there are multiple ways to finish that sentence. So I hope you don't just come here just for a feel-good time. I want you to know that you, yes YOU, are sent from here to live your lives as disciples of the faith. And when we worship, when two or three or more are gathered and experience the presence of the living Christ, there should also be a blessing at the end, a reminder that you are already, right now, beloved by God and always will be. It's a both/and. Go and do. AND Relax and know that God loves you.

John's gospel, I guess, is in some ways all about that journey from beginning to end, from the Word's presence with God at creation to the library of books that we would have at the end if everything had been written down about Jesus' life. Even the washing of the disciples' feet, and the institution of the supper of remembrance, and the giving of the new commandment of love are a narrative set up for this long speech. For in this long speech – Jesus is going to tell us exactly what he expects of us as his followers – so it's time to sit up and pay attention. We are being charged. We are being sent. We are being blessed. And then Christ prays for us.

You trust God, don't you? Well, don't you? This time it is Jesus asking. Do you trust in God? Well if you do, then, he says, "Trust me." Jesus begins with assurances – a good place to start with skittish disciples like us. He assures us that God has a place for us where there is always room for one more. He assures us that we have a guide on the road, a testimony to the

truth, and a promise that life is abundant. Jesus establishes his connection with God in relationship. Jesus belongs to God, and God knows and loves everything about Jesus. His very words are God's words. His actions steeped in holiness. Trust it. Believe in it. Know it to be true in your very being. And if it still seems like too much – pay close attention to the things Jesus has been doing.

Trust Jesus. That's the very first charge of this reading. Put your faith in him. Every day. Even before you get out of bed in the morning, allow Jesus to be your guide, to be your truth, to be in your life. Trust in Jesus when things are going your way. Trust in Jesus when nothing is going your way. It is the first premise of the Christian faith. Trust. Believe. Know. It is a mindset – quickly followed by a way of life. Our Protestant forefathers and foremothers put this trust first before relying on anything that they did, and it was precisely because of passages in scripture like this. They knew that we weren't going to get everything "right" in what we do. We cannot possibly do enough to measure up to what God is promising us. So we have to trust that Jesus is being honest with us in telling us that God loves us without qualification or exception. That we are accepted on a premise of grace freely given. When we do trust in Jesus, it doesn't necessarily make life any easier, but it is enough, most days, to give us hope.

But even our Reformed theological heritage that put such high stakes on faith knew that faith without following would be hollow. Jesus calls us to continue doing the work that he was doing. Now that we're two thousand years out from the time in which he lived, that may seem strange to us. In fact, the church has put Jesus on such a pedestal that us thinking we could be like him is considered taboo, or at least arrogant. We are taught to believe that no one could be like Jesus. No one can do the things that Jesus did. Even in his human doings – what he said and

did is portrayed as unattainable. We set those things up sometimes I think to get us off the hook from trying.

Jesus says something in this passage that surprised me the first time I took close notice of it. Jesus says, “The person who trusts in me will not only do the things that I’m doing, but even greater things, because I’m giving you the same work that I’ve been doing.” Did you hear that? We are to do the work that Jesus did, and maybe, just maybe even greater things. I’m not sure we even want to believe that. It reminds me of the popular Marianne Williamson quote from her book, *A Return To Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles*. She says, *“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine as children do. It's not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own lights shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”*

Jesus also tells us that what we request of him, he will do. Now, I don't think that's permission to ask him for wishes like releasing Aladdin's genie out of the lamp. But when we are aligned with his work, he will be present to direct us, and guide us, and help us create the kind of world he imagined during his walk in it. I dare say that probably is our deepest fear – that we have been called not just to believe in Jesus but to follow his way in the world, AND that he trusts in us to do it. How will we liberate others by letting our own spirits expand – like Jesus' did?

Therefore, it may be important for those of us intent upon following Jesus to do exactly what he asks of us. Believe in him, and pay darn close attention to what he's doing in the world. Then go and do it, and even better things, ourselves. For starters, we can remember that Jesus listened, he healed, he touched, he taught, he preached, he comforted, he challenged, he prayed, and what else would you add to that list...

Remember, in these next few weeks, we will be charged, we will be sent, we will be blessed, and Jesus will pray for us. Pay attention. This is your sending, the real work of worship, to give you your motivation for what you will do in the world. Trust in Jesus. Do his work. Amen.