

UP IN THE AIR  
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in Brookfield, Connecticut  
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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.”

Philip 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, Philip, 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.”

Is it just me or does it seem like the world is spiraling out of control these days? Banks collapsing left and right. People getting shot because they rang the wrong doorbell. Artificial intelligence taking over the planet. The government running out of money soon if we don’t raise the debt ceiling. Everyday there’s something new in the headlines, and it gets overwhelming. Sometimes it feels like everything’s up in the air, and we’re all holding our breath, waiting for something to give, waiting for something bad to happen, waiting for the next disaster to strike. It’s confusing and scary and totally exhausting, and it makes it really hard to live your life. How do you move forward, how do

you think about the future, how do you stay hopeful when it seems like the end is nigh?

Well, the gospel reading today is just what we need. On the one hand, it validates our experience. Yes, it tells us, sometimes the world is confusing and chaotic. Yes, sometimes the news is scary. Yes, sometimes we just want things to make sense. On the other hand, it gives us something to hold on to. Yes, it tells us, God gives us a way that’s clear when all else is murky, a truth that’s certain when all else is slippery, a life that’s assured when all else is in question.

As the story opens, Jesus is having a difficult conversation with the disciples. He

tells them he's going to go and prepare a place for them in his Father's house, and when he's done he'll come back and take them there so they can be with him. And oh, by the way, he says, "you know the way to the place where I am going."

The disciples look at each other like, "What?" And then Thomas, speaking for the group, says, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" He's voicing the frustration all the disciples are feeling—frustration that's been building for a while now. Remember, they've given up everything in order to follow Jesus—their homes, their families, their livelihoods. They've made huge sacrifices. They've put their reputations on the line. They've risked getting in trouble with the authorities. And instead of being straight with them, all Jesus does is talk in riddles.

So, Thomas lets him know they're going to need more than that. Lord, we don't know what you're talking about. Tell us in plain language. You owe us that much. We've stuck by you through thick and thin. Tell us what the plan is. Tell us where we're going. Show us the way to get there.

But as frustrated as they are with Jesus, he's even more frustrated with them. He's been showing them the way this whole time. He's been showing them the way to God with every act of kindness and compassion and mercy he's performed since the day they first met. He's been putting the way, and the truth, and life right in front of their faces. But they just can't see it. They're too dense. They're too literal-minded. They're too unimaginative. So, Jesus takes another stab at it. "If you know me," he explains to Thomas, "you will know my Father also." If you look at what I'm like, you'll see what God is like. Because the things I do reveal God's temperament, God's character, God's personality. You gotta give him points for trying, that's for sure, but it doesn't do a whole lot of good. The disciples are still confused, and now it's Philip's turn to speak for the group. "Lord," he says, "show us the

Father, and we will be satisfied." Lord, quit playing games and just tell us what we want to know.

Now, at this point, I picture Jesus smacking himself on the forehead, saying, You've gotta be kidding me. It's like talking to a brick wall. But to his credit, he hangs in there. "Have I been with you all this time," he says, "and you still don't know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" Again, blank looks on all their faces

What Jesus is trying to tell the disciples, and what they're struggling to get, is that his relationship with God is so close and so deep that there's no daylight between them. They effectively share the same heart, the same mind, the same will, the same purpose. That's what this story is about. In the gospel, when we see Jesus healing the sick, when we see him giving sight to the blind, when we see him feeding the hungry, when we see him forgiving sinners, when we see him breaking bread with tax collectors, when we see him talking to Samaritans, when we see him praying for his executioners, we're seeing God do all those things.

So anything we could ever want to know about who God is and what God wants for us is right there in Jesus—in the way he brings comfort to those who are hurting, in the way he cares for those who are vulnerable, in the way he accepts those who are unacceptable, in the way he welcomes those who are unwanted, in the way he loves those who don't love him back.

And when it seems like the world is spiraling out of control, and it feels like everything's up in the air, that's what you and I can hold on to, that's what we can put our trust in, that's what we can draw strength from. That's solid ground we can walk on when all else is sinking sand—knowing that God's always there for us; knowing that God's always in our corner; knowing that

God's always cheering us on and supporting us; and knowing that all of that is God's nature. God can't help it. It's fundamental to God's being. God could no more stop loving us than a bird could stop flying or a fish could stop swimming.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

Jesus gives us the assurance that following him is the way to know God, and knowing God is the way to have peace and joy in our lives no matter what's going on in the world around us.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

Take a step forward, Jesus says, and keep going. The path is right in front of your face. You won't slip or fall. The footing is sure. You won't lose your way. I'm here to guide you.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

You can let out the breath you're holding in. You can let go of the fear you're carrying. The world could fall apart tomorrow, and God would still be God, and you would still be God's people.

So, the next time you're lying awake at night, worrying about one thing or another, try reading this story again, and put yourself in it. Think about how anxious and confused and upset the disciples are, hear what Jesus is telling them, and picture him saying the same thing to you. Then try talking to him. Tell him about everything that's on your mind and ask him to carry all of that for you. Then see if you don't feel a little bit calmer. See if your worries don't seem quite as big and scary. And see if you can't close your eyes and sleep the whole night through.

Amen.