

May 10, 2020
Christ the Servant, Reston
Easter 5
John 14:1-14

In the musical, “Jesus Christ Superstar,” there is a song entitled, “Heaven on Their Minds.” The song is sung to Jesus. Part of the lyrics go this way:

Jesus
You've started to believe
The things they say of you
You really do believe
This talk of God is true

And all the good you've done
Will soon be swept away
You've begun to matter more
Than the things you say

“You’ve begun to matter more than the things you say.” The lyrics speak to me because they capture the spirit of today’s gospel from John in which the disciples are addressing Jesus in a way which is, at the same time, trying to make sense of Jesus. The scene takes place on the night in which Jesus is to be arrested. Jesus knows what lies ahead: His betrayal. His trial. His suffering. His death. And he is preparing his followers for that time while, at the same time, reassuring them.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled,” he tells them. “Believe in God. Believe also in me.” And then he says to them words which I have used at funeral and memorial services so many, many times; “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 to 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.”

When Thomas says, “But we don’t know the way,” Jesus says, “*I am the way.*” When Philip says to him, “Show us the father and we will be satisfied,” Jesus says, “If you have seen me, you have seen the father.”

Back to the “Jesus Christ Superstar” lyrics: “You’ve begun to matter more than the things you say.”

The disciples were beginning to struggle with the larger question of who Jesus *was* and what he *meant*. They had lived with the things he *did* ... the miracles, the healings ... and they had lived with the things he *said* ... the sermon on the mount, the beatitudes, the parables ... but now they were faced with the question of who Jesus was.

This Jesus was not just a great teacher, a phenomenal healer, and a cutting edge prophet – but he was, in essence (and substance), God. He was divine. He and the father were one. His *being* was beginning to matter more than his words. In him was life beyond life. “In my father’s house are many dwelling places,” he told them. “I am going there to prepare a place for you.” So many sermons at funerals are based on this text because it gives people the hope of life beyond death. And we should always hear it that way. We don’t have to be at a funeral to hear that Jesus goes to prepare a place for us with God. This is an Easter message, too.

But, there may be another way to hear these words, also – a way which adds another dimension. When Jesus spoke to them about life beyond life he wasn’t speaking exclusively of another life beyond this one... a life out there in the clouds in the sweet by-and-by. He was also inviting them to come, meet God, and experience life in the Kingdom of God. This would be a life beyond the humdrum daily routine of fishing, grinding grain, or picking grapes. This would be a life in which God becomes a part of who we are and what we do with each and every breath we take – not just someone we visit and honor one hour every Sunday morning. Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen God.” So, life beyond life would be living the way we saw Jesus live. Life beyond life would include giving special emphasis to the

poor and the poor in heart, hungry people, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Life beyond life would mean living as healers, as feeders, as clothers, as counselors. Life beyond life would mean being prophetic – speaking truth to power and making one holy noise about all the injustice which seems to flow forth from places on high. Oh, Jesus was preparing them for life beyond life, but it wasn't just all about going to heaven.

And, when you think of it this way, then... when Jesus said that there were many dwelling places waiting for them ... maybe it didn't just mean that heaven has lots of room for lots of people – like a really, really big resort hotel. Maybe it also means that there are many different and colorful ways to live in life beyond life. One person may dwell in the Kingdom of God as a teacher of special needs children. Another person may dwell in the Kingdom of God as a social worker at Cornerstones who puts homeless people in homes. Another person may dwell in the Kingdom of God as a virologist who is searching for a vaccine or a treatment for Covid 19. And all of these people dwell in different rooms. One dwells in a classroom. Another dwells in an office. The other dwells in a laboratory. In our Father's house there are many dwelling places. Jesus has gone before us to prepare a place.

Jesus has shown us the way. Jesus *is* the way! Would you like to see God? See Jesus. Would you like to meet the one who give you forgiveness, deliverance, and life beyond life? Meet Jesus. Our gospel, John, is called the incarnational gospel because it proclaims that Jesus is the incarnation of the divine – of God. Humans can only relate to human things, things they can see, touch, taste, smell. That is why God chose to come to earth in the form of a living, breathing, human being.

Well, let's wind this down with application. Isn't that supposed to be the last part of the three part sermon. First, there is the explanation (of the text). Then there is the proclamation (of the good news). Lastly, there is the application (how

this applies to daily life.) So, how does this apply to daily life, especially life in the time of Coronavirus?

It seems to me that we have been wondering recently less about whether there is life after death and more about whether there is life after Coronavirus. How do we get through this? DO we get through this? How do I stay safe? How do I keep loved ones safe?

When Jesus invites us to consider life beyond life he invites us to consider living so that others may life. In the time of Coronavirus we are invited to take this literally. How can we go about living so that others may literally stay alive. The application here invites us (no, “commands” us) to obey the guidelines. We may be carriers whether we know it or not. So we stay in so that we don’t go out and make others sick. The masks are not designed to keep us from *getting* the germ. They are for keeping us from *giving* the germ.

So many of the protestors in the state capital have been waving signs (and guns) under the banner of “personal freedom.” As one person said to them: “The thing about the “personal freedom” you seem to be missing; it was never supposed to be just about you. It wasn’t purely about independence. It was about interdependence; about loving our neighbor as ourselves, about being our brother’s keeper, about caring for one another because we’re all in this together. That what the anthems declare and the statues proclaim and the songs announce.”

Jesus invites us to a life beyond life on this side of the grave. “In my father’s house are many dwelling places.” Last time I looked, living together in a parent’s house means that we are family. How do we live together as brothers and sisters? By being brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus has shown us the way. Jesus is the way!