

## Sermon for May 18th, 2014

### Fifth Sunday after Easter, John 14:1-14

#### Christ is Risen!!! He is Risen Indeed!!! Alleluia

At the end of February this year I had the opportunity to be one of the spiritual directors at a Lutheran Cursillo weekend. A couple of weeks before the weekend was to take place, the **head** spiritual director, a **very** nice man named Pastor Ed, asked the **3** spiritual directors what **size** t-shirts we wore and what **color** we liked best. We each gave our reply not knowing exactly what Ed was up to. Well, **this** is what he gave each of us—this t-shirt which, for those of you who cannot see what it says—it says, *“It’s not a religion. It’s a relationship.”* I truthfully did not think too much about those words **until** I began to read over our gospel text for today.

Is it **any wonder** that this passage from the Gospel of John is one of the most frequently used passages at funerals and memorial services? It is full of **relational language**, words that provide comfort and hope, words that give a sense of safety and wellbeing as we face the unknown.

These verses are in the middle of what is called “Jesus’ Farewell Discourse”. Jesus is telling his disciples **what** to anticipate in the events which lie ahead of him—the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension to God the Father. But as

we have heard **many** times before the disciples are just not quite understanding what Jesus was telling them.

We hear Thomas and Phillip asking questions and making statements which lead us to believe that there was **linear** thought. Thoughts of only how the process would all work. Thomas wants to know, “*How can we know the way?*” Phillip says, “*Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.*” Once again the disciples **only** think of what was right there in front of them. Of course, for you and me on **this** side of the resurrection, we can rather **easily** sit back and critique about how the disciples did not understand the message that Jesus was trying to convey.

The disciples had been with Jesus for **nearly 3 years** and during this time, as it was written in John’s gospel, the disciples had witnessed many miracles done by Jesus such as: the turning of water into **wine** at the wedding in Cana where it is said that Jesus first revealed His glory and his disciples put their faith in Him, the **official’s son** who had been healed at the **exact** hour Jesus had told the official, “*You may go. Your son will live.*”, the **invalid** who had been healed at the pool at Bethesda when Jesus told him, “*Get up. Pick up your mat and walk.*”, Jesus had miraculously fed the **crowd of 5,000** people with 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fish, Jesus **walked on water** when the disciples were 3 ½ miles out on the lake—a **strong** wind was blowing—they were **terrified** and Jesus said, “*It is I; do not be*

*afraid.*” and suddenly they were at the shore, Jesus healed the **man born blind** when he spit on the ground—the man went and washed in the Pool of Siloam—and then he could **see**. In a miraculous style once more, Jesus raised his friend **Lazarus** from the dead—**4 days** in the tomb—Jesus had the stone taken away, he looked up—gave thanks to God—His Father—called out in a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come out!*” and he did. **All** these things along with many more signs Jesus did in the company of His disciples and **yet** Phillip says to him, “*Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.*”

Jesus must have been **exasperated** by this time!!! His reply to Phillip is, “*Have I been with you all this time, Phillip, and you still do not know me? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?*”

In my mind, **here** is where the relationship piece is the most evident, Jesus continues, “*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.*” **All** of these signs and miracles had been done right before the disciples’ eyes. Yet; still there was doubt.

*It is not a religion. It is a relationship.* I would like for us to take a moment or two and take a deeper look into this idea of relationship. This all begins back in the Book of **Exodus** at the burning bush when Moses encounters God. Moses asks God, “*What is your name?*” God replies, “*I AM WHO I AM.*” Now that may sound to you like a pretty obscure response but let’s move ahead to the beginning

of John's gospel where John writes, "*The Word (capital W) became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.*" Dwelling, presence, abiding, among us—relational. John goes on to say regarding Jesus sharing God's divine nature, "*grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the One and Only who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*" **More** relational language.

As we remember last week's reading we heard the **first** of Jesus' 7 "**I AM**" statements. We heard him say, "*I am the gate for the sheep.*" He continued by saying, "*I am the good shepherd.*" And today we heard Jesus say, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*" This is all relationship language. Language which we cannot put our hands on or touch. The "**I am**" statements in John's Gospel make Jesus known as the **true** source of life, abundant grace, and is seen as the One who is in connection with the **very presence** of God.

Thomas and Phillip—if you cannot understand with your hearts that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; then believe because of what you have seen. Believe in what is concrete. **Believe** in what you have seen right before your eyes. The (big T)**Truth** is right in front of you. Thomas and Phillip were looking for something tangible to hang onto but relationships are not like that. Relationship and connection is something which is felt and experienced with the heart.

I have to tell you that **writing** this sermon and in **absorbing** the language of this text something changed inside of me—my **heart** was opened. I feel we

Lutherans are **really good** at looking at the concrete theology and asking the **hard** questions. In seminary I really learned a lot about theology and we talked a lot about those hard theological questions so when one of our parishioners comes up and wants to have a theological discussion we are knowledgeable. We pastors **do** need to know those things. But, I confess, we talked **precious little about** what it means to have a connection to God with our hearts. To **open** our hearts and find the **divine mystery** of God's presence in the everyday relationships of life, to find God's presence in the **smallest of the small**, and what it means to **sense** God's presence in the here and now. **That** is what relationship is all about.

That is what Jesus was talking about in this passage—connection at the deeper level—a bond that cannot be broken—not by life, nor by death. Do **not** let your hearts be troubled. **Believe** in God, **believe** also in me, **I go** to prepare a place for you—so we can all be together one day. **I will come again, I will take you** to myself so that **where I am you** may be also. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life*, no one **comes to the Father** except through me, if you **know me**, you **know my Father**. **Believe me** that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, I will do whatever you ask in my name so the Father may be glorified in Me.

*It is not a religion. It is a relationship* with God the Father through His One and only Son. It is a connection with the One who is the way, the truth, and the

life, the one who goes to prepare a place for us for all eternity. *Now, that is a relationship. AMEN.*