

Bible Study Guide: Week of 5-4-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

John 14:1-14

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2 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? 3 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. 4 And you know the way to the place where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 9 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"? 10 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. 11 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. 12 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. 13 I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

After two weeks of hearing about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and a week to consider Jesus as the Good Shepherd (and gate for the sheep), we get this passage from Jesus' farewell discourse. It seems we just read something similar to this in worship during Lent. We join the disciples in looking back at the words Jesus spoke after the resurrection. It is with this awareness that Jesus is risen that his words take on new significance for us.

These words also take on new significance in this time of COVID-19. "Do not let your hearts be troubled" is a daily reminder we can all use at this time.

2 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? 3 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.

The word for "dwelling places" (*monai* in Greek) can also be translated as "mansions," "lodgings," or "rooms." This noun *monai* is rooted in the Greek verb *meno*—to remain or abide or dwell. This verb is crucial to John's understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the church—in John 15, Jesus tells the disciples to "*meno*"—to remain or abide or dwell—in him as branches of a vine. Here, the translation "dwelling places" underscores this same concept in a way that "mansions" or "lodgings" cannot capture. Note also that the "you" here is plural. What

Jesus is doing in his death and resurrection is not preparing a place for each individual, but rather making room in the Father's house for a new family unit—the community of the church.

This passage can be translated two different ways. The first is what the NRSV has for us:

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.

The second is:

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. 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.

The first option doesn't really make sense because as far as we know from what John has reported, Jesus has not told the disciples that he is going to prepare a place. How we break up these sentences doesn't really change the meaning drastically, but it is worth noting that there are two ways to do so.

4 And you know the way to the place where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Here the word for "way" is *hodon*. This word can mean "way" in literal sense—a road, path, or journey. It can also mean "way" in a figurative sense—the mode or means by which something is accomplished. Apparently, Jesus and Thomas are speaking on these two levels. Jesus is speaking figuratively—"the way" to which Jesus is going is his way of suffering, death, and resurrection. Thomas thinks Jesus is going away and he doesn't know "the way"—that is, "the road" Jesus is going to take on his way out of town. Jesus goes on to claim that he *is* the way—he is the means by which his disciples will live the life God intends for them.

7 If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 9 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"? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

Jesus has in mind for his disciples fellowship with the Father. More than that, he has in mind a sort of adoption of his chosen ones as children of God. Remember, in John 1, we heard that "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." And in John 20 as Jesus appeared and spoke to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection he told her, "go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Along with the images above where Jesus mentions welcoming the disciples into the Father's house, Jesus clearly has in mind a new family unit formed by his life, death, and resurrection.

Also in this portion of the passage we see what is perhaps the clearest claim Jesus ever makes of equality with the Father. This passage with others like it would influence the theology of the Holy Trinity in the early years of the church.

The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 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.

"The works" Jesus refers to are the signs or miracles that he did during his earthly ministry. John has carefully told this story so that the signs point to Jesus' identity and mission as God's son. His words and his works are

inseparable and here Jesus tells Philip and the others that they should trust the words and works of God that Jesus has done in their midst.

12 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. 13 I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Here, Jesus promises that the church will continue his ministry and do “greater works” than the signs Jesus has already done. Asking “in Jesus’ name” doesn’t mean merely ending a prayer with “In Jesus’ name we pray,” but rather means asking something in accordance with Jesus’ will and ways. Rather than asking, “I want a million dollars, in Jesus’ name. Amen,” we ought to pray that Jesus’ will be done through us. God will honor and answer such prayers. Perhaps not in the way we expect or intend, but God is indeed at work through us to do greater works than Jesus did in order to bring glory to God and bring about God’s will in the world.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Is it difficult for you to “not let your hearts be troubled” in this day and time? How can you trust and take hold of Jesus’ command, “Believe in God; believe also in me” at this time?
2. Jesus’ insistence that “no one can come to the Father except through me” has often been used by the church to exclude and judge those who believe differently than we do. How can we remain true to our belief that Jesus is indeed God’s means of salvation without shutting out or writing off those who may believe differently? I do not mean that we must cheapen our theology, but rather I want us to consider our hospitality and welcome and witness to those who have different views than our own. In other words, how do we show forth Jesus’ life and love even to those who do not know or believe in it?
3. What works can you think of that the church has done or is doing that would qualify as “greater” than Jesus’ works? How do you think Jesus is leading us to “out-do” him in showing mercy and love to the world?