

Sermon
Kirk of St James
Sunday May 25, 2025
Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton

Occasionally when I am getting ready for Sunday sermons I look back in my notes to see what passages I have preached on over the last few lectionary cycles and without fail I have always chosen Acts and not John this particular week, and I understand why. I wrestled with this passage all week, and I am still uncertain what I think about it! Part of the issue is that John always feels like a bit of a mystery due to how he chooses to frame things, and the language he uses. While Matthew, Mark and Luke cover a lot of the same territory because they most likely used the same source material, John is an outlier. Plus there is also the question of interpretation. You can strike out in a number of different directions with this passage, including going down a major rabbit hole about the trinity based on John's phrasing, however we are not going to go there today. Instead we are going to look at the hope present in this passage.

While John can be difficult at the best of times, we are coming into our passage this morning partway through a longer discourse from Jesus known as the "Farewell Discourse." It is the passages where Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death. You may be most familiar with the opening of this chapter as it is often used in funerals, "In my Father's house there are many rooms..." After that opening discourse, Thomas asks a question about how they will know the way to Jesus, then Philip asks a question about seeing the Father, and then Judas (not the betrayer) asks a question, and our passage today is the answer to Judas. For reasons beyond my understanding the lectionary does not include the question but it is crucial for our understanding this morning. Judas asks, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" Thus far Jesus' teaching has been for his disciples, trying to help them

understand what is coming, and to trust and not despair. The disciples have no idea how these very doubts are soon going to bubble over in response to the crucifixion of Jesus. For now though, Jesus is laying the groundwork they are going to have to trust in for the future—1) If you love me, you will do what I say; 2) I give a kind of peace that the world cannot give (or take away); 3) You need not be afraid in the face of new tomorrows.” It is these points we will pick up on this morning.

Death and separation are difficult experiences no matter what. A while ago I saw a post from a friend whose mom had passed away and they flagged that they were “feeling thankful” about it. I am not criticizing this reaction, we all respond to grief in different ways, it just caught me off guard. Even when we are a Christian it is more than okay to feel sad when we are faced with death. It does not mean that we don’t believe in the promises of God, it does not mean that we don’t have faith, it simply means that being severed from someone in this way is painful and difficult. It is not unusual at a funeral to hear phrases like, “Well they lived a good long life,” and the implication is that because of that fact they shouldn’t feel sad. But it doesn’t matter how old someone is, when we love them, we miss them. Age does not negate sadness, Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. It is one of the reasons John 14 is my favourite passage to preach at a funeral.

I chose this passage for dad’s funeral because I have always felt like Jesus meets us here in our grief. He chooses imagery that we can understand, like home, and houses, and in his response to Judas he gives us the hope we need to hold on to in the difficult days afterwards. For the disciples the reality of being separated from Jesus after his death, and the realization that they will now need to carry on his ministry without him would have felt overwhelming and

impossible. At this point they don't fully understand what is coming but Jesus does, and these are the words they need to hold onto and the answer to Judas' question. The world can wait, this moment is for the disciples so they have what they need in the difficult days ahead. The first being, "If you love me you will do what I say."

Above all the disciples must keep living and sharing the good news that Jesus has taught them. While that may feel like a scary or impossible prospect Jesus goes on to assure them that not only do they have everything they need Jesus is going to send an advocate to help them who will continue to teach and remind them. God does not leave the disciples or, humanity alone to face the challenges of this world. As one writer said, "this Farewell Discourse testifies to the resources and riches that the disciples stand to inherit if they stand firm. There will be no surprises, because the Advocate will tell them all things in advance. Against such spiritual resources, the ruler of the world does not stand a chance."

How reassuring those words must have been in the moment. Even if Jesus does leave them they will not be alone. Jesus describes the holy spirit as a teacher and reminder. If we think back on our lives to the best teachers we have had there are likely some commonalities. People who saw our potential, who believed in us, who saw the best in us, and most likely came alongside us. They probably also challenged us, pushed us and encouraged us in ways that surprised us. Those relationships have huge impacts on our lives and that is the type of presence the holy spirit is going to be. "The holy spirit reminds us who Jesus is. Jesus is the one who sees a person open to salvation when the world sees only Zacchaeus, a conniving tax collector. Jesus the one who sees a foundation for the church when the world sees only Peter, a man of flimsy faith." Jesus looks at us and sees who we are and who we were created to be.

Lastly Jesus leaves us peace that the world cannot give us or take away. Where God is present there is peace. While life can be filled with anxiety, fear and uncertainty, we will always be held in God's love. As someone who struggles with decisions I had a friend once tell me to always go with the answer that brings you peace. It is a good bit of advice. Sometimes we find ourselves trying to talk us into a certain decision, or wrestling with something. Following the thread that leaves us feeling settled or at peace is often the right one, even if we do not understand at the time. For the disciples they are going to face major decisions and fears, and Jesus assures them that they do not need to be afraid and to follow the way of peace. If we look back to the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had other options, to run, to debate, to argue, but, he chooses the harder path knowing it is going to lead exactly where he needs to be.

It was not easy for the disciples after Jesus was crucified, but this farewell discourse which is also in many ways a promise prepares them for what lies ahead. These things still hold true for us today, we love God and follow, we trust the holy spirit to lead us, and we rest in the peace that only Christ can offer.