

## Farewell Discourse

The passage we're reading this morning continues to narrate Jesus' last night with his disciples. These next four chapters are almost all Jesus talking to his disciples. It's called the Farewell discourse.

Probably the place where we've most often heard this passage read is at a funeral. And verse 6 is one of the most abused verses in all of scripture. So it's no doubt familiar.

But if we really want to understand it, we need to hear it in its original setting. So before we read it, imagine the scene.

Jesus' disciples are the only audience for this. Imagine yourself sitting there with your friends. Jesus, your teacher, has just washed your feet. You heard Jesus' awful words that he will be betrayed and killed. Worse, it turns out one of your fellow disciples will betray him.

Just after you hear that, Jesus says something to Judas you can't hear. Judas leaves in a huff. Then Jesus says that Peter will deny knowing Jesus.

With confusion, anxiety, grief, all swirling in your head, Jesus begins to speak.

**14** "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>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? <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going." <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know<sup>[d]</sup> my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."  
<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." <sup>9</sup>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'? <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>If in my name you ask me<sup>[e]</sup> for anything, I will do it.  
<sup>25</sup>"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. <sup>28</sup>You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup>And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. <sup>30</sup>I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; <sup>31</sup>but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way.

Don't let your heart be troubled? Seriously? How could it not be? Your whole world is about to come crashing down.

And you're not sure you follow what Jesus is saying. Thomas and Philip don't. Thomas is looking for a map to this place Jesus is talking about. If only Jesus could give him some coordinates to plug into the GPS on his phone, he'll be happy.

But, Jesus isn't talking about a geographic place...or really a place at all. In John's gospel, heaven isn't a place – it's not really some big mansion in the sky, gospel music notwithstanding.

Heaven is simply where God is. And where God was right then and there was standing in front of them. Jesus is the way to God because Jesus is God.

So, this is the place to deal with verse 6. You've no doubt heard this verse used at least on occasion as a sort of threat. Whether it's spoken or unspoken, the assumption is that if you don't believe in Jesus, hell is your destiny. And of course, it's typically focused on what happens when we die.

But Jesus in John's gospel never mentions hell. And although he does in the other gospels, I believe even there it doesn't mean what people think it does.

What Jesus does here is make them a promise. See the words spoken here are not spoken to non-believers. They are spoken to Jesus disciples, including us.

They are words for anxious disciples who don't want to lose their relationship with their teacher, a man whom they have come to love deeply.

But he's also making the claim, as clear as it can be, that he is how they will maintain their relationship with God going forward.

What Jesus is saying is that if you know me, and you do, then you know God. He says I promise you, I will always be where you are, and therefore, God will always be where you are.

There is a belief known as universalism. It's the belief that all will be saved – universal salvation. If you're looking for support for universal salvation, John's your gospel. Even though this oft abused line would suggest otherwise.

John's prologue envisions Jesus the Word through whom all the cosmos was created and calls Jesus the savior of the world – the cosmos. In Jesus' crucifixion he says he will draw "all" people to himself.

And this bit about many dwelling places is believed by some to mean Jesus is the way for people besides Christians. Same with his good shepherd teaching – he has sheep of other folds.

I lean towards that, but I confess I don't have all the answers. We will always have to admit that there is an awful lot about this business of salvation that will remain a mystery to us. And how salvation might work for non-Christians is God's deal, not ours.

But, we are Christians. So this verse is meant to reassure us that relationship with Jesus is relationship with God which is salvation. It's life, abundant life in the here and now and on into eternity.

That brings us to the big problem...Jesus was leaving. Jesus would die. This was always an inevitability because to become human means to die. John's gospel is solidly incarnational. It is solidly about Jesus in this world. Now, the disciples have to come to terms with what happens when he is no longer present in the flesh.

The disciples were not worrying about where they will go when they die. They are worried about what it means that Jesus is going away – how will they continue to relate to Jesus after he dies?

But Jesus, in a way they maybe aren't able to grasp yet, points beyond his death. He points not just to his resurrection, but also to his ascension.

There's a link made here that the other gospel writers don't make. Notice that Jesus says he will send another advocate. Jesus was the first Advocate. There's another to come. That's where our relationship lies and it's some not second-best relationship

It's only with Jesus' ascension that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, can make her dwelling place in all of us. The Spirit is now our way to God.

Throughout the Bible, the presence of God is an important theme. It's what set apart Yahweh, the God of Israel, from the gods other nations believed in. Those were distant gods whose presence was represented by statues and idols.

But the God of Israel was present for real. In the Old Testament, God is present in a variety of ways.

At creation, God is present as a wind over the waters of chaos. In Exodus God is present in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, leading Israel to the Promised Land.

After the building of the tabernacle, then the Temple, God's presence was in in the Holy of Holies in the center of temple. But it wasn't a flesh and blood presence.

The priests and the prophets were go between for God.

In the Old Testament, God's presence is not direct. It's always either veiled or mediated.

Then Jesus came and God was present in the flesh. For 30 or so years. Then what?

Jesus' death is not the end of God's presence. Instead, it's the beginning of God's presence in a whole new and utterly stunning way.

God's presence will be in the people with whom God is in relationship. Because of the ascension and the coming of the Advocate, God is now in all of us. We are the ones called to reveal God...in the flesh. Crazy, huh?

So, what does that mean for us? We inherit this same promise that through Jesus, his ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit we are always connected to God. God is always with us...in us in fact. It's an almost embarrassingly intimate relationship.

Our translation calls the Spirit the Advocate. The word in Greek is paraclete. Para means alongside, clete comes from the word to call. So, paraclete is "called alongside."

The paraclete is variously translated as Advocate, as in ours, helper, counselor, teacher, comforter, guide. The paraclete – who is the Holy Spirit – is all of those things. It is the person through whom we stay connected to God...to the whole of the trinity.

In fact it takes us up into the trinity. It's the Holy Spirit who enables us to do even greater works than Jesus. Do we even really believe that? I think we seriously underestimate the power the Holy Spirit gives us.

Not power over others, but power to continue the work of Jesus to bring abundant life to all creation.

I think that might be the most important thing out of all of this. Jesus' work wasn't done. Jesus didn't have a chance to teach his disciples everything they would need to know.

The paraclete, the Advocate, will continue to teach. And the paraclete will point back and remind all of us disciples that the one commandment Jesus gave in John's gospel was to love one another. And if they ever needed a check on whether something they felt called to do, the love commandment was that check.

Well, all of that is true for us, too.

The Spirit did not stop teaching and encouraging and guiding and comforting and reminding once those original disciples died. That same spirit does the same for us.

When we never get beyond what the Bible literally says, when our understanding of love never moves beyond the first century, faith becomes frozen.

How many people have Christians hurt over the years because they refused to allow the Spirit to do her job and continue to teach and guide us? How many people still are? How many Christians believe there can be nothing new in faith beyond what the Bible said thousands of years ago?

I think it is time for us to trust the Holy Spirit truly can do what Jesus said here. That through us, the spirit really can bring healing, peace, justice...and true love for one another, all across the globe.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid. You have been given an unbelievable gift...a partner...an advocate...who enables you to do amazing work to bring more love into the world. Trust that.