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John 14:1-14

May 7, 2023 Fifth Sunday of Easter

***John 14:1-14***

***14“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2In 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? 3And 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.***

***4And you know the way to the place where I am going.” 5Thomas said to him,*** ***“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” 8Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” 9Jesus 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’? 10Do 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. 11Believe 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.***

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

Adam Grant, a psychologist specializing in organizational psychology, wrote a book called “Think Again! The Power of Knowing What You Don’t Know.” Evidently as a child Grant was known as Mr. Right. Because he was actually Right, a lot. So it’s kind of ironic, but also bound to happen, that Mr. Right should write a book about being wrong! Being wrong often means that we are curious, our world is expanding, and we gain even more knowledge. So being fiercely correct is not a sustainable life strategy, and is actually very limiting in the long run.

For one thing, we have to be capable of changing our minds, be willing to learn something new or unlearn something old, just to adapt when “the times, they are a’changin’.” The text for today comes from Jesus’ last supper with his disciples before his death. Debi Thomas, says this about today’s text:

“Jesus has just finished a last supper with his disciples.  He has washed their feet, given them a new commandment, predicted Peter’s denial, foretold Judas’s betrayal, and told his friends that he is about to leave them.  “Where I am going,” he tells them, “you cannot follow now.”

Needless to say, the words sting, and fill the bewildered disciples with fear.  What is Jesus talking about?  How will they survive if he leaves them?  Where will they go?  What will happen to their cherished plans?  Why is the ground shifting under their feet?  Why is everything changing?”1

For the disciples, “the times, they are a’changin’.” Jesus’ entire earthly ministry was only about three years, so it is relatively recent that these disciples have gone from meeting Jesus to asking themselves, “Could it be?” and then to “He is the messiah we have been waiting for.” But everything changes with Jesus’ words at the last supper. At the end of the previous chapter Jesus tells them that he is going away and they cannot go with him now but will follow later. And then the start of chapter 14 Jesus comforts and confuses them: But don’t worry, says Jesus, there is plenty of room for you where I am going. I will prepare a place for you and you will be with me there.

Where? Thomas wants a map. ***“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”***Philip wants proof. ***“Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”***

What must the disciples have thought of Jesus’ response, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” I was part of a team conducting an interview the other day and one of my colleagues asked the person a question, and I sat back thinking, “what?” I didn’t understand the question. Finally the person asked if my colleague could rephrase the question. I could just hear Thomas or Philip saying, “Could you say that again?” We know because we are on this side of the resurrection, that the disciples must have not thrown up their hands in despair and walked away. We have our faith because they were willing to re-think their experiences in light of Jesus’ words, and eventually, probably a little at a time, able to try to come to grips with Jesus who had died. They were able to adapt, partly through Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances.

Christianity has never been easy, as we know from all of the arguments and wars we have experienced over these 2000 years that have manifested as so many different denominations and branches of denominations over time. Our faith has been adapting and reframing as time and history have taught us different perspectives of human nature and the nature of God’s love.

What else might we hope to re-think in light of our faith and new understandings of God’s love and God’s heaven here on earth? Maybe we could not only change gun legislation, but maybe try to figure out why so many people even *want* to kill others. Protection? Dog-eat-dog way of the world? What are we so afraid of that we won’t let go of our need to lash out so violently and permanently to harm another.

I met a 2nd grader yesterday in my studio. She saw all of my paint markers and wide-eyed said to me, “I wish I were you!” She stayed a while and painted a cat, and a rainbow unicorn while we chatted for a while. I asked her about school, what was her favorite part about it (hanging out with her friends), did she like her teacher (yes, but she’s a little strict). My new 2nd grade friend said that she wished her teacher wasn’t so strict, but then said, well, sometimes a little strict is ok. But maybe she doesn’t need to be strict when I don’t finish my work, but only for bigger things. Strict, she said, should be only for when someone hurts someone else.

She gets my vote. Imagine if the legislators thought like that. We don’t need to come down super hard with laws, but if someone is hurting someone else, well then we should be strict. Save strict for the things that are really big. Instead states are increasingly passing stand-your-ground laws and putting the burden of proof on the victim to prove that they weren’t being threatening. We need to Think Again! about that.

Another thing to re-think came to mind when hearing and seeing so much about King Charles III’s coronation. Monarchy sounds so much like “empire” and “colonization” that is pretty old news and its time to re-think about leadership. The coronation was a huge piece of world history happening so seemed important to at least notice. While opinions vary about living in a monarchy and life with the form of government that brings, it was at least to an outsiders view like mine, heartening to hear about what things had changed. Girls singing with the boy choristers for example. The coronation of Camilla. These are things I would never have experienced firsthand, but others have. What other changes will be coming, maybe for the better with the next generation?

What about closer to home? A few of us are going to a summit on homelessness in San Mateo county on Thursday. I expect to learn what I don’t know at that summit, and gain more knowledge about possible solutions. I’m going to an event at Glide Memorial church this afternoon. They have a discussion series called “come to the table” where they learn to have discussions among people of differing opinions about very difficult subjects. This afternoon the discussion will follow a film and panel discussion with the producers of the film. In 1994 people at a Brookline clinic were murdered. This film, which features six white women with deeply held convictions and opposing beliefs on the topic of abortion, will resonate with all people and organizations struggling to have difficult conversations or make meaningful progress on divisive issues. The film, “The Abortion Talks: Finding Common Ground Across Our Deepest Divides,” is a documentary film featuring the story of six women on opposing sides of the abortion debate in Boston who met together in secret dialogues for six years after the 1994 Brookline clinic murders. These courageous leaders risked their personal safety and professional lives to meet. The experience would forever change how they speak to and about each other. They would begin to engage in more cross-partisan efforts. And they successfully prevented future violence.

With the rise of false information, fake news, blatant misleading or wrong statements being spread and believed by so many, along with the speedy rise of AIChat, leaves me thinking that it is so tempting to take what we know and dig in our heels. Sometimes we have to. We don’t have the luxury of giving up. And yet, we need to find opportunities to re-think important things every now and then or we will never learn to be communities of people with differing opinions. The summit, the conversation at Glide and even movies and novels bring us these opportunities. I highly recommend Jodi Picoult as an author who writes novels about big subjects from multiple perspectives so that you begin reading the book feeling certain you know how you feel about the issue, and by the end, even if you haven’t changed your mind completely, you have been taken on a very plausible journey through the subject.

When the disciples heard that the story they had planned for themselves and Jesus together in their future was not at all what was going to be, they had to re-think something the knew deep within their hearts. They had to adapt to the circumstances right in front of them, the reality on the ground. What they learned was that Jesus did actually go away, but he was also with them always. They found the love of God through their experiences with Jesus, and after he was gone, through the remembering of his words to them, and through the experiences throughout their remaining days. What did *not* change for them and is still true for us is that no matter what we go through, no matter how our lives change over time, Jesus is in us and with us. In this we can trust.

Amen.

1<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2632-you-know-the-way>