

PEOPLE OF THE WAY**Scripture Readings:** Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14**Texts:** Psalm 31:16; John 14:6, 9

The passage from the gospel of John is the beginning of a very long discourse that Jesus gave to his disciples at the Last Supper. Within the gospel, the discourse is the gospel writer's depiction of Jesus' farewell to the disciples to provide them guidance and encouragement in the days to come. The gospel writer also invites us, the readers, to overhear the discourse so that it may comfort and guide us.

Even though the discourse is long and involved, we modern readers so often focus on one verse, verse 6: "Jesus said to him (Thomas), 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.'" The modern take on this verse seems to imply an exclusive doctrinal statement which, when we think about it, sounds out of place in the gospel of John.

This is the gospel where Jesus welcomes a member of the opposition and tells him that God loves the world in this way: that God sent God's only Son to save the world, not condemn it. Jesus heals people on the Sabbath and stands up to those who want to condemn him for these acts of mercy; he welcomes a Samaritan woman; he feeds 5000 people without asking for credentials; he takes away the judgment made against a woman caught in adultery; he embraces the disabled though his society judged them as sinners, and he even raises a dead man. Through the gospel, Jesus welcomes the outcast and the sinner, he embraces without question, and he invites all into God's love and grace. So, what is going on in verse 6?

Context is everything for the gospel writer of John where he continually links themes and ideas throughout the gospel. The discourse at the Last Supper is no exception. The context for the passage can be found at the very beginning of the passage when Jesus uses the phrase: my Father's house. The only other place that Jesus uses that phrase in the gospel of John is back in chapter 2.

At the end of chapter 2, Jesus and his entourage have gone to Jerusalem where Jesus discovers the mall at the Temple—you know where they sell animals for sacrifice and exchange money; I would bet they even had a Starbucks! Jesus felt miffed and so he kicks out the merchants with the tagline: Stop making my Father's house a marketplace.

Nothing upsets the bigwigs more than interrupting commerce, so they confront Jesus. Jesus' response is very important: he tells them, tear down this temple and in three days, I will raise it up. The bigwigs are skeptical, they know how long it takes to do a remodel—I mean, think about here—and in their case, the Temple had already taken 46 years to get a partial remodel. We, the readers, know that Jesus is not talking about the building, we get the three day reference, and just in case we don't, the gospel writer tells us that Jesus was talking about himself.

We learn: God's house is the Temple, and the Temple is Jesus.

When Jesus tells his disciples (and us) at the beginning of the passage that there are many places to abide in my Father's house, Jesus is talking about himself. The gospel writer loves the word abide, he uses over half of all the instances where that word is found in the New Testament. In the encounter Jesus has with his first two disciples, they ask him where he is abiding; he responds, "Come and see."

From there the gospel takes on a journey to see how Jesus lives and what abides in him. We see him confront power with the truth and he provides people with life through healing, feeding, acceptance in the face of judgment, and even life itself when he raises Lazarus from the dead. We can understand that in the way of Jesus abides truth, life, love, and forgiveness.

At the Last Supper, Jesus sums up his way when he washes the feet of his disciples and invites them to do the same to one another. Just before he begins his farewell discourse, he commands his disciples to love one another as he has loved them: in the context of the gospel that means his disciples are to welcome, heal, feed, accept, forgive, and bring life to the dead. To abide in Jesus means we love one another.

With that understanding, we realize that the verse we really should focus on in this passage is not verse 6 but verse 9: Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Jesus has revealed the transcendent God in what he does: his way is a way of truth, life, love, and forgiveness. When Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—the nouns are not doctrinal but descriptors of what Jesus does. The implication that follows is that we can access the Life Eternal, God, by also doing what Jesus does.

Verse 6 is not so much a statement that we utter but a statement of what we are to do. We know that a person abides in Jesus and Jesus abides with them when we witness them welcoming all people even those who are imperfect or "sinners." We know that Jesus abides with them when they fearlessly confront unjust power with truth. We know that Jesus abides with them when they lead lives of healing, acceptance, forgiveness, and love. To abide in God's house is not a vacation away from the cares

of the world, rather to abide in God's house means that we throw ourselves into the healing and forgiving work of Christ in this world God loves.

We belong to the Body of Christ, the household of God, where we have been invited to abide. If we abide in this house, we can trust that Christ abides with us. Since God's very nature is revealed in Christ, that means God's nature is revealed in us when Christ abides with us. God's house is us.

This idea has huge implications; how are we doing? In our ministry and mission, how are we showing the way, the truth, and the life?

A few weeks ago, you were asked to think about the various strengths and missions that you do as a congregation. Those things are some of the ways that you demonstrate truth and life. The challenge, of course, is how you continue to strengthen these aspects of life, love, and forgiveness; and to explore where you can do more.

When you come together as a community of faith, the hope is that you experience Christ abiding with you so that you may also reveal the way, the truth, and the life of God.

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