

### ***Show Us Jesus***

In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ: The twelve disciples were feeling uneasy. Jesus, their Master, was acting in ways they had not seen before. It was like a heavy burden of concern had descended upon him. Here they were observing the ritual Passover meal together, which normally is a festive celebration of the Lord's saving work for his people; but this time it was different. Jesus led them through the rite slowly, deliberately, gravely, as if to infuse each part with deeper meaning. At one point early in the service, he had taken the shocking step of washing their feet. It was unheard of that anyone in a position like his would perform such a lowly task. It made them all quite uncomfortable; but he told them that unless they would allow him to do it for them, they had no part with him. Then he told them he had set an example for them. I've shown you what it means to humbly serve in love. That's how I want *you* to love one another. People will know that you are my disciples by your love.

Later, as the service was wrapping up, he gave them the devastating news. One of you is about to betray me, he said. And I will be going away. You can't follow me where I am going now. Indeed, all of you will abandon me. Peter objected. I'll follow you even to death, he declared. They all said the same. No, Peter, you won't, Jesus replied. Not now. But later you will follow me.

This is the backdrop that leads to the discussion we heard as today's Gospel reading. It explains what it is that's troubling the disciples. Jesus has just laid some very heavy stuff on them. And at this point they don't know what to make of it all. We have the advantage of knowing what's about to take place; they are going to experience it as it happens, and for them it will be horrifying and confusing.

So Jesus tries to prepare them in advance. Don't be troubled in your hearts, he tells them. Believe in God; believe also in me. That is to say, trust that God the Father is in charge of all that happens. He's got this in his control and he's doing it for a purpose. Trust also in me, God's Son. I am fulfilling my Father's will.

Then he explains why: In my Father's house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you. In the old King James version that was translated "in my Father's house are many *mansions*", and because of that many got it in their heads that Jesus meant that he was going to work on some kind of massive heavenly building project, and that everyone would have their own palatial home in the next life. But that's not what he's saying. What he means is that there are dwelling places or rooms in his Father's house for many people, but unless he goes – specifically goes to the cross to suffer and die to atone for sin – those places will be vacant. They are closed to you. But by his death he opens the way. *That's* how he prepares a place for you.

He continues, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself". This is the promise of resurrection, both his own and that of the believer. Then he adds, "And you know the way to where I am going."

At this, all the disciples are even more confused. Thomas puts forth the question that's in all of their minds, "Jesus, we don't know where you are going. How can we possibly know the way?"

Full stop. Before we get to Jesus' well known answer, let's ask the question, where *is* he going. The common answer is, well, he's going to heaven. And while that's true in part, let me suggest that Jesus means something more. Where he is going is to death and resurrection. He is passing through death to new life, life eternal. So when he says, "I am the way and the truth and the life", he's saying because you know me, Jesus, you know the way through death to resurrection; you know the truth that sets you free from sin; and you know and are already in possession of eternal life. All of that because you know and trust Jesus. These are words of pure comfort to anyone troubled in heart.

And then he adds the words that offend so many: "No one comes to the Father except through me." We call it the scandal of exclusivity. In general, but especially in our day when each person's version of truth is considered to be equally valid, people have the notion that all religions are pretty much the same and they all lead to the same place. It doesn't matter if you call God Allah or Krishna or the Great Spirit or the Force, it doesn't matter what you believe about him ... or her ... or them, all religions exist to provide their adherents a moral code or framework in which to live their lives, that, if they try to adhere to, will guarantee them a happy welcome into the next life, whatever that happens to be. And I have to say that is a wonderful thought—to Satan, because that's exactly what he wants people to believe. It's devilish lie that is leading many to eternal ruin.

And what's so clever and deceiving about this lie is that there is some truth to it. It's true that the vast majority of religions teach some set of ethics or moral rules to live by. And they offer their adherents a program of steps whereby they can improve themselves and climb higher and higher on some ladder of wisdom or spirituality or enlightenment or mystic experience or whatever. The point is that you improve yourself. You do the climbing. You reach up to God. You win the prize.

But it's precisely this that separates the Christian faith from all the others. The Christian faith starts with the truth that people are dead in sin and destined to eternal destruction. Dead sinners cannot improve themselves, they cannot climb any ladders of increasing perfection, they can't reach God, they can't win any prize. It's a situation that's hopeless, hopeless if not for a God who in love and mercy reaches down to dead sinners, who humbles himself and takes on human flesh, who fulfills the righteous requirements of the law *for* dead sinners, who offers his sinless life as a satisfaction for their sin, and who rises again to prove that death's power over dead sinners is itself dead. The Christian faith alone gives us Jesus who is *the only way*, *the only truth*, and *the only life*. And what a way, truth, and life he is.

It should be said, however, that some in the history of the church have taken these words of Jesus too far and applied them very narrowly only to their own particular church body. That is to say, unless you are in fellowship with us and believe everything we teach and confess, well then you don't have Jesus or any of the blessings and benefits he brings. You may be aware that until fairly recent times, this was the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Sad to say, since Vatican II in the early 1960s, they have since fallen off of the other side of the horse, so to speak. They now teach that while Jesus alone is the way and the truth and the life; and that he alone saves sinners, there are many who believe in Jesus who have never heard of him and don't even know who he is. The idea is because there's a little bit of truth in every religion, and Jesus is the truth, well, then, every religion has a little bit of Jesus in it. And that bit of Jesus, no matter what it is, is enough to save you. Again, it's a wonderful sounding idea that I'm sure makes Satan very happy.

But look: when Jesus says "You know the way" and "I am the way and the truth and the life", he's talking to his disciples. He's talking to men who have spent the last three years in his

constant company listening to him teach, watching him heal people, walking with him on the road, and sharing meals together. He's talking to men who *really* know him. And later when he tells them to go into the world and teach all nations everything I've commanded you, he doesn't mean, "Oh, don't bother. They have enough of me already." No, he sends them out into a world of people dying in ignorance of the truth without which they cannot be saved. There is no knowing Jesus apart from his Word.

Returning to the text, Jesus continues, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." It's a remarkable statement; but again one that confuses the disciples. This time it's Philipp who says what's on their minds. "Lord, show us the Father. That would be enough for us."

It's a face-palm moment for Jesus. He really is astounded that what is so obvious to him is completely lost on them. "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philipp? How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is no mystery to Jesus. As God the Son, it's his very existence and being. It's who and what he is and has been from all eternity. He is because the Father is always in the process of giving himself in sacrificial love for the Son. Thus he is in his Father and his Father is in him. Therefore if anyone sees and knows Jesus, they see and know the Father in him.

Now, we can perhaps excuse Philipp and the others to some extent because that's a pretty mind-bending concept to grasp. But Philipp's request to see the Father (what, more directly?) reveals the real problem. There is inherent in all of us the desire to see something more, some greater revelation, something more awesome and glorious and spectacular. Even Moses who spoke with the Lord face to face on Mount Sinai wanted to see a greater manifestation of the Divine Being. "Show me your glory", he asked of the Lord. And the Lord told him "No one can see the fullness my glory and live."

Referring to the Father, earlier in his Gospel the Evangelist John writes, "No one has ever seen God; the only God [that is the Son], who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." That is to say, the almighty Father in his wisdom and for our own protection has chosen to reveal himself to us in and through his Son. He wants us to look at Jesus and only at Jesus. He wants us to hear his voice in his Word. Through his Word he wants us to see Jesus in his ministry, in his teaching, in his miracles. Most especially he wants us to see him in his passion, death, and resurrection because that's where we see the fullness of the Father's love for us. Now in the church age he wants us to see Jesus where he locates himself in Holy Baptism and as he shows himself to us in his body given for us and his blood shed for us in the Sacramental elements of Holy Communion.

The Father wants us to see and to know Jesus because he alone is the way and the truth and the life. Therefore let us not seek greater manifestations of God's glory than he has chosen to reveal to us. Rather, let our prayer to the Father always be "Show us Jesus". In his holy name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***