

Sixth Sunday of Easter

22.05.2022
By Trevor Williams

Introduction

This passage is part of Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples on the night before his death. After the powerful act of washing the disciples' feet, Jesus says he will be betrayed. Judas the betrayer leaves the room. Jesus has also said that Peter will deny knowing him. This unsettled the disciples. Clearly some disaster is imminent; the disciples are confused and very scared. So Simon Peter asked Jesus, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answers, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterwards' (John 13:36); then Thomas says to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' (14:5); then Phillip says, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied' (14:8); and then Judas (not Iscariot) says, 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?' (14:22). Judas' question immediately precedes the reading for today.

The disciples have a sense of impending disaster, but can't take in what it is; some terrible change is about to happen, some painful loss. They can already feel it.

Can you put yourself in the disciples' shoes? Do you remember such a time?

What is the feeling? What is the effect of that feeling?

The great contrast in this passage is between the fear and confusion of the disciples and Jesus' promise of peace.

Text

John 14:23-29

Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 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. 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. 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. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

Comment

I remember a facilitator, who believed in the power of good questions, asking us to split into small groups to share our personal answer to the question 'What is the crossroads you are facing in life, just now?' It's a powerful question that led to deep insights as we shared our lives together.

The crossroads for the disciples was stark. Their leader, teacher, the person they had left all to follow, had begun talking in a way that was very strange to them. Jesus was talking about leaving and coming again. The crossroads that the disciples faced was to follow their fear or trust the promise of peace.

In so many cases, fear can impel people towards violence. Russia has sought to justify the invasion of Ukraine with the allegation that the West was threatening their security.

For the disciples, the effects of fear included confusion, anxiety, inability to listen and inability to imagine a positive future. They were paralysed by the prospect of such great loss, and as a result it is no surprise that in Mark's account, at the moment of Judas' betrayal in the garden of Gethsemane, they all forsook Jesus and fled (Mark 14:50).

So what is the path to peace that Jesus promised, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you'? Jesus is speaking about 'peace' as a gift, and more specifically as his gift to his disciples, 'my peace I give to you'. I am sure you can remember a time when, as a child, you were woken by a terrifying nightmare and rushed into your parents' or guardians' room to be reassured. They were at peace, and they were able to give you their peace. No doubt you were soon contentedly fast asleep again.

Similarly as adults, when we are fearful, the presence of a trusted companion can be a source of peace, when they are able to give us their peace.

The indwelling presence of God is a common theme in John's gospel and echoed as Jesus says 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me,' (John 14:11) in this case mutual indwelling. In today's reading 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them' (John 14:23).

The phrase 'we will come to them and make our home with them' (John 14:23) is beautifully elaborated upon in a relatively new commentary of John's gospel by Professor David Ford, where he writes

‘Dwelling is central to this. Where is our true home? Where are we utterly loved? Where can we feel comprehensively safe? The answers shift the focus of those questions from ‘where’ to ‘who.’ Whose is our true home? By whom are we utterly loved? With whom can we feel comprehensively safe? The key to all of them is where I am (a phrase repeated at crucial points such as 12:26 and 17:24). But being where Jesus is is not just a matter of physical proximity—his enemies as well as his friends had that. It is about the basic condition for being truly at home, for love that is mutual, for comprehensive safety: well-founded trust. Therefore, ‘Believe in God, believe also in me.’

As the apostle Paul reminds us, ‘without love I am nothing’ (1 Cor 13:2). Love is the centre of Jesus’ message, (the word) and the centre of Christian discipleship. As children we learn to love in response to those who love us. This is true also as followers of Jesus. In response to Jesus’ love, so clearly demonstrated in his words, his teaching, his life and his death, we are also drawn to love him in return. ‘We love because he first loved us’ (1 John 4:19). This is the beginning of the transformation of our lives, whose grounding and motivation is formed and energized by love. We love others, as He loved us, not in obedience to a command, a duty to be performed, but as an expression of love that is the fruit of being loved. John wraps all this – and so much more – in the final verse of our Gospel set for today, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’ (John 14:23).

The crossroads the disciples faced was to follow fear, or pursue peace. The reliable guide at this crossroads and all others is love: finding our identity, our security, our true selves through God’s indwelling presence whereby we are loved and empowered to love.

David Ford, *The Gospel of John*, Baker Publishing Group (Kindle Edition p.271).

Response

Reflect on these words from David Ford:

‘Whose is our true home? By whom are we utterly loved? With whom can we feel comprehensively safe?’

Reflect on what strengthens your awareness of God’s love.

What nourishes that awareness and what diminishes it?

We are all different. Have courage to accept your own path. Awareness of God’s love may be nourished for us through:

- Personal prayer
- Reading scripture, particularly the Gospels.
- Other reading
- Corporate worship (Many who find personal prayer difficult, find corporate prayer very meaningful)
- Meditation
- Contemplation
- Being present in nature
- Creative activity
- What else?

In what ways does being at home in God's love bear fruit in our work of building peace?

Prayer

Ever present God
may we live in the awareness
that you are with us.
May your presence so permeate our lives
that we may face the challenges of life
grounded in your gift of Peace
assured that nothing can separate us from your love.
Amen

Further Reading

David Ford, *The Gospel of John*, Baker Publishing Group.
