

“Watch This Space...”

One of the things that makes preaching difficult is following the lectionary to the exact jot and tittle. We stepped away from our Year C Gospel, Luke and have been hanging out with the Gospel writers of John's Gospel. John's gospel differs from the Synoptic gospels in that it doesn't contain the nativity or birth story. John's gospel begins with the Baptism of Jesus and leads us quickly into Jesus ministry.

This is the Sunday before the Ascension, which the Johannan community mentions, and yet is never directly referenced in the readings assigned for Ascension.

Today's Gospel begins in the middle of a conversation. It begins “Jesus answered him” (John 14.23, NRSV). Now, I wonder if it begins here because the person who had just asked “‘Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?’ (John 14.22, NRSV) was, in fact, Judas, well not THAT Judas...Judas but NOT Isacariot. So much confusion that his name was changed to Jude.

St. Jude, my Patron Saint. The patron saint of lost causes and chronic diseases.

Jesus has been teaching his apostles with increasing urgency after his resurrection because he knows his days on earth are limited. He has been trying to teach his disciples, before he was crucified, with mixed results. And now, since the breakfast on the beach, when Peter was returned to Jesus' favour after replying in the affirmative to the question “Do you love me?” He is paying close attention to what Jesus is saying and teaching because he understands. Peter and the apostles are finally understanding that Jesus is with them because he has to finish his work before he goes. And he'll be going very soon.

It likely has NOT occurred to the disciples just how Jesus intends to go. And WHERE Jesus is going to. Spoiler alert - that question gets answered next week.

THIS week we are teased with a bit of the Ascension story. Jesus is preparing the disciples that they must trust him. They must listen to what he says and learn from him because soon, he won't be with them.

And knowing they will be afraid after Jesus leaves, especially in the WAY he leaves, he promises that he will not leave them alone.

Have you ever been in a situation, where a person you know and love is dying and you believe you have time to have another conversation with them before you say goodbye. And then the unthinkable happens and they die before you can see them again?

Next month will be ten years since my Dad died. We were told in December 2006 that he needed surgery and without it would live only six months. He lived until June 2012. Yet every time I would visit, which was every few months, I would say goodbye as though it were the last time I would see him.

The reality being, if his aneurysm was to burst, he would be dead in minutes. And it took me the better part of a day to drive from Dorchester to Sudbury, Ontario. My Dad never said Goodbye. It was either "Take it easy", or "See you later".

On the phone he would just say "right" and hang up. Not a big talker, my Dad. Not an overly emotional chap either. That's how he was wired.

So to provide some perspective from where we recapture the Johannine Gospel, Jesus has been preparing his disciples for his departure. Keep in mind, these sections, Chapters 14 to 17 are referred to as the "Farewell Discourses" as they take place before Jesus is arrested and crucified.

And yet these messages are incredibly important for the disciples to hear, so the editors of the Canon of the Bible, put them in this order. At the beginning of the Chapter Jesus speaks individually to Thomas, to Philip and to Jude.

Thomas' discourse beautifully sets up one of the most recognised passages from the Gospel. Jesus says,

And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

(John 14.4-7, NRSV)

This is Jesus' reassurance to Thomas that they will not be left behind. They will eventually go where Jesus is going, because they trust in God, and thus trust in Jesus. Thomas, wonderful Thomas, who asks the questions the other disciples won't. Thomas who is prepared to march to his certain death if it means supporting his rabbi, teacher and leader.

Next up is Philip's question;

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' 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"? 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.

(John 14.8-10, NRSV)

You can feel Jesus' frustration with Philip. We've been hanging out for awhile now, Dude and you STILL don't know who I am? You STILL don't know to whom I belong?

Don't despair, Philip does redeem himself after Jesus' Ascension. He's the one who meets the Ethiopian eunuch on the road and upon baptising him, begins the Ethiopian Church. One of the wonderful things about Jesus. He does NOT hold grudges and is exceedingly generous with his grace.

He may have been frustrated at that moment with Philip, yet he knew that Philip, with some gentle coaching, would figure out his place in the post-resurrection and post-ascension times.

Finally, and what is included in today's reading is the question that is asked by Judas - NOT Iscariot, the one we grew to know as Jude. He asks:

'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?' 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.

(John 14.22-26, NRSV)

Jude poses an excellent question...how is Jesus to show himself to the disciples yet not to the world, as the world is not ready to know this yet. Remember, "the world" are the ones who put Jesus to death not that long ago!

Jesus attempts to assuage the anxiety the apostles are feeling. He assures them that those who love God and keep God's commandments will join Jesus, at a time yet to be determined, in God's glory. He's telling them, assuring them, that if they continue with the good work they are doing and do not lose heart, they will all know the glory of God.

Then Jesus first introduces the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, which is first referred to as the Paraclete. Paraclete comes from the Koine Greek word παράκλητος (paráklētos). A combination of para ('beside/alongside') and kalein ('to call'), the word first appears in the Bible in John 14.16.

The Paraclete is also known as advocate, helper and comforter. Jesus has promised that until he returns, he will send an Advocate, who will remain with us. Now, at the risk of giving away some of the story of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, Paraclete, Comforter is not a new creation of God. Oh no.

The Spirit of God has been around since the beginning of creation. The very first words of the Hebrew Scriptures, Genesis 1.1 Are you ready to have your mind blown?

The very beginning of Genesis begins with one very special word, "Bereshit"

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

B'rēshiyt Bārā élohiym èt haSHāmayim w'èt hääretz

In the beginning Élohîm אֱלֹהִים created the heaven and the earth.

"In the beginning" we know that part, right? Except there's a translation error. In biblical Hebrew there are no prepositions, bereshit literally means "in a beginning". Let me say that again "IN A BEGINNING".

Not THE beginning, A beginning.

וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

w'hääretz häy'täh tohû wävohû w'choshekh' al-P'nëy t'hôm w'rû^ach élohiym
m'rachefet al-P'nëy haMäyim

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness [was] upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of Élohîm אֱלֹהִים moved upon the face of the waters.

w'rû^ach élohiym, spirit of God.

The Spirit of God is not a new creation. The Spirit of God is not a New Testament discovery. The Spirit of God has been with us from the very beginning.

In a beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth. And the "w'rû^ach élohiym, spirit of God" moved upon the face of the waters.

The Hebrew imagery is absolutely beautiful, yet best left for another sermon.

All of this to say Jesus promised the faithful that he would not leave them stranded and afraid. He told them that he had to go to make room for the Parclate, the comforter, the advocate, the w'rû^ach élohiym, spirit of God.

Then Jesus does something positively beautiful. He reminds them, one last time:

'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." (John 14.25-27, NRSV)

In other words, It's okay, my beloved. I have to leave you for a while. But you won't be alone. You'll have each other and the Paraclete will remind you of what I taught you. You carry on in what you have learned. Watch this space my beloved, and before you know it I'll be back with you.

Amen. Alleluia!!

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan, Incumbent
Elk Valley Ecumenical Shared Ministry
Christ Church Anglican & Fernie Knox United
Sermon for Easter 6, 22 May 2022
John 14.23-29