

John 14:1-14 5 Easter 5/12/20 Pastor Bill Uetracht

As many of you know, I love to ride my bike. This is my bike. It's one of my best friends. We've spent a lot of time with each other. It has accompanied me for thousands of miles. Twice it went with me across the state, once with Ed Wosinski, our director of high school youth.

When you ride a long way, you need stops along the way. When I ride the trail that is out in front of the church, I often will go many miles north, perhaps to Hart. One of my favorite resting places along the way is Country Dairy in New Era. I love soft-serve vanilla ice cream, and a large cone is sometimes just what I need in order to make the rest of the trip.

John's gospel speaks of Jesus going ahead of his disciples to prepare a place for us. In his Father's house, he says, there are many dwelling places. Unfortunately, due I think to the King James' Version of the Bible, we have seen those dwelling places as mansions that we get to inhabit after we die. For some people, Methodists get a certain mansion, Lutherans get a different mansion, and then people of no faith, they don't get any mansion.

But this is not the reference at all. The word used for dwelling places (badly translated "mansions") is a Greek word that is associated with temporary resting places for travelers. It's a place of hospitality when you are on your journey. When Jesus says that he goes ahead of his disciples to prepare a place for them, he is using caravan language. In a caravan, someone would go ahead of the group to make sure that all the hospitality needs for the group were taken care of, so that when the group arrived at their destination their needs would be met.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is getting ready to die. What we have today is a part of his farewell discourse, in which he tells his disciples something that good therapists or Stephen ministers or pastors

shouldn't, in my opinion, tell their clients or care receivers: Don't get too worked up. Do as Jesse Jackson told a grieving Freshman who was distraught over his team's loss in the NCAA final: "Smile through your tears, and speak above your pain." Now truthfully, I don't think too much of that advice. I normally say to people, "Cry all you want, and feel deeply your pain."

But I suppose at some point, there is truth to the call to rise above the pain. Jesus is asking this from his disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust into God (the literal language of the text.) Trust into Jesus. In God, there are many resting places along the way. You will find the divine hospitality that you need as you go into the future without me. I, Jesus. am paving the way. I'm going ahead of you. And if you trust me, you know that I will make a way for you, that I will give you the hospitality that is required.

You know, as I look to the future right now, I wonder how we are going to make our way. At least for a while, the future is going to look very different than the past we have known. I have known what my places of hospitality are in the past. I am acquainted with what has rejuvenated me in the journey, and much of that involved connections with people, shared meals, intimate worship services and Bible studies, big church gatherings, time out with friends, concerts, plays, frequent visits to our great downtown, rubbing elbows with folks in the midst of large crowds. There is going to be a whole lot less of that for a while. For me, that sounds quite stark. I wonder how I am going to make my way.

You wonder as you look to the future, how are you going to make your way? Maybe you have lost someone, maybe this virus stuff overwhelms you, maybe health matters deeply concern, maybe family struggles are devastating you, maybe life's oddity, its unfairness, its

randomness just has gotten you down. How are you going to make it in the future?

There are no guarantees. But there is a call to trust. Jesus says that he is the way, the truth, and the life, which means that he connects us to the Father (to God). In those words, he gives us three more of the great “I am” statements of the Gospel of John—statements that link Jesus to the name for God in the Old Testament, “Yahweh,” meaning “I am who I am.” When Jesus in the Gospel of John says, “I am,” he is communicating that he himself reveals God. He himself makes known what the God of all, the God of creation, the God who bring it all into being, is like. And if that is true, to trust him is to trust the reliable architect of the cosmos.

Now admittedly, trusting is not easy; it certainly is not a matter of guarantees. Yet Joseph Sittler has said: “the risk is the romance.” With those words, he was speaking of marriage and the trust it entails. But I suspect that this is the truth of all of life. The risk of trust is the romance to which we have been called.

Now I have to point out that the future that Jesus in the Gospel of John is going into, the future for which he is preparing a way for his disciples, is a future of *death*, and yes, then life. Where Jesus is going is *the cross*, and then the resurrection. To follow Jesus is to go into *death* and then life. When he says that he is the way, the way is not a password into heaven when you die, it is the way of death and life now. We all are heading toward death. And to follow him is to go there with him. To follow him is to die. Trusting requires dying—dying to the sense that we in ourselves are totally sufficient; dying to the illusion that we aren’t vulnerable; dying to the lie that life is all about us.

Life bursts forth as we tell the truth, as we admit that we need other people and need Something much larger than ourselves. It bursts forth as our lives become less about our neediness and our self-

preoccupation. It bursts forth, in other words, as we die. But knowing this requires trust. Our natural instinct is to hang on to life, to hang onto ourselves, fearful if we let go, life will disintegrate. But life in Jesus, the way, suggests otherwise. Real life, the abundant life, eternal life, John calls it, happens when we let go, when we trust, when the risk becomes the romance.

To go into that kind of future requires good hospitality. Jesus' movement to the cross and the resurrection are that hospitality. We will have what we need for the journey ahead. It's not going to be easy, but the king of hospitality is preparing the way.