



Pastor Michael O'Neill
May 14, 2017

Ashes to Fire, Easter Week 5
With Jesus and the Disciples (1)
John 14:1-14

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West Valley Church
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A2F
Easter Week 5:
With Jesus and the Disciples (1)
(John 14:1-14)

As we've already told you, this is the first Sunday for Pastor Roger. We thought this day might not arrive! I first met Roger over the phone back in September when I called to ask him if he would be interested in having a conversation with me, and he graciously agreed. That phone call became the first of many as we became better and better friends, without ever having met each other in person. In November we both realized that it would be best to have them come out and visit us, but we were approaching December, and Christmas season is kind of busy for a worship pastor, and not good to take time off. So he and Joy came out the first week of January. During that visit we spent hours together with Shelly and I, with our pastoral team and families, and with the Leadership Team of the Church. At the end of those three days, we offered him the position and they agreed. We were all so excited! This was no small decision; Roger had grown up in that Church (KC First), and has been the worship pastor there for over 15 years. Joy's parents live right across the street from them. Their roots were very deep. This would be a major move.

We began to lay out a timeline for when Roger would begin, and we decided that he would arrive mid-March, and then Joy and the family would finish up some commitments and arrive mid-May. One of those commitments was for Joy to complete her bachelor's degree, which she did, and just graduated last week!

Unfortunately, just a couple of weeks before Roger was to come out here, his mother was admitted to the hospital, so we decided it would be best for him to stay there until they knew what was going on. Sadly, by the time they finally received a confirmed diagnosis of cancer, it was only a couple of weeks later that she passed away – on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It was best at that point for Roger to wait, and then come out with the rest of his family. So while we are incredibly thrilled that you are all finally here, our excitement is tempered by the heaviness we feel for the reasons for your delay. We are grateful that Roger's dad, Harold, was able to come with them, but saddened because Delta was looking forward to making the trip with you all. And of all days, it is Mother's Day.

I'm pretty sure that, if back in September when you agreed to that first phone call, if I would have said, "By the way, this phone call will lead to you uprooting your entire family and moving halfway across the continental US, and your mother will go to heaven in the midst of it all," you probably would have hung up the phone on me right away!

I think *I* would have said, "You don't want to take this call!" Moving is hard, even in the best of circumstances.

But when Jesus tells us that we will be moving to a new home that he personally is building for each of us, well, now *that* we can look forward to!

That's exactly what Jesus is saying as he comforts his disciples to encourage them to endure trouble in the passage from our reading for today in Ashes to Fire. A2F is our daily Scripture readings and meditations that began on Ash Wednesday back on February 10, and will end on Pentecost Sunday, June 4. By the way, we'd like to have a baptism service to conclude our series, so if you have not been baptized and are interested, please let us know as soon as possible.

I want to read the passage to you, and I'd like to ask you to stand as we hear together God's Word. The Bible says that faith comes by hearing, so let's listen well:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.
(John 14:1-14, niv)

In this scene from John's Gospel, chapter 14, the disciples are headed for some seriously troubling circumstances, so Jesus comforts them with some great words for them, but they can make a difference in our lives today, too. We are going to see what's going on in the minds of the disciples and of Jesus so we can better learn and apply it to our lives so it's real for us. We will find comfort as well as purpose for our lives today. So grab your notes and a pen or pencil and let's learn from what's going on by first seeing that there is going to be...

1. ***Heart Trouble***

The words of comfort we are looking for are in chapter fourteen, but we need to back up to chapter 13 in John's Gospel to see what's going on in the first place, and find out *why* the disciples needed to be comforted.

In Chapter 13 we see Jesus sitting around the table at what we know is the Last Supper – his last meal with his disciples. The disciples didn't realize yet that it would be their last meal with Jesus. They did not know that in a matter of hours, Jesus would be arrested and then crucified the next morning. But in the course of that meal, Jesus tells them that He'll be betrayed by one of them, and he tells them that he's going to "go away." Then he says that they won't be able to follow him where he's going – at least not right away. Of course, we know that he was talking about His death, but *they* didn't comprehend that.

Remember that the disciples had given up everything to follow Jesus; three years before, they had walked away from their careers to follow Jesus. Now, they must have thought, after three years, Jesus says he's going to leave them? Jesus was the guy they thought was going to be King of the Jews and all Israel. If Jesus goes away, they'll have nothing left. So Peter blurts out that he would follow Jesus to the death. Jesus questions Peter about that – he says, "Really? You'll lay down your life for me? The truth is that before the rooster crows in the morning, you'll deny me three times." That hit like a punch in their collective guts. The room got deathly silent. The disciples are deeply troubled by what they are hearing.

Let's examine the things that the disciples must have been feeling. They likely were wearing their emotions on their faces and their hearts on their sleeves; knowing what they were thinking, Jesus was prompted to comfort them. The things they were feeling are things that we can relate to today in our lives, things that we need Christ to comfort *us* with, also.

I think that they must have been struggling with feelings of...

Failure

Over and over again, Jesus would try to explain things to them and they just wouldn't get it. At times Jesus would say, "Do you still not get it?" They must have felt like they'd failed him again and again.

Then along comes Peter, the self-appointed spokesman for all of them, sticking his foot in his mouth (yet again) by claiming that he'd follow Jesus to death if he had to. But in chapter 16, Jesus tells them that they will *all* scatter and abandon Him, so when Jesus rebuked Peter, they *all* felt the sting. They all knew in their hearts they would run when trouble came. Jesus looked them all in the eye when he said it. They *all* felt the stab of failure. They must have thought, "Is this why is he leaving us now – because we are going to fail?"

Do you sometimes feel like a failure? Maybe you grew up being told you were a failure, or that you couldn't ever do anything right, so deep inside you is this nagging feeling that whatever you do, no matter how hard you work, it won't ever be good enough.

Maybe when it comes to your Christian life, it's even worse. You feel like you are bound to fail, that you will never be good enough for God. You think that God *must* be disappointed in you. Do you know that feeling? The disciples did.

I think they also must have begun to feel...

Forsaken

Jesus told them that He was going to go away and they wouldn't be able to come with Him. If I were them, I would've thought, "Are you *kidding* me?" After leaving everything behind to follow *Him*, He was going to leave *them* behind. It hardly seemed fair or right. How could He just abandon them like that? And how could they go back to their towns and families now? I'm sure that early on, the disciples probably carried on among their friends and family about how *they* found the Messiah, and they probably even strutted a little about the fact that Jesus chose *them*. Now they would have to go back to those same people and would have to eat their words.

But even more importantly than that, they had come to love Jesus. They staked everything on following Him, and intended to follow him the rest of their lives. Now it seemed that he was saying he was just going to forget about them and go off and leave them.

Have you ever felt abandoned by those you love? Maybe your parents weren't there for you. Perhaps someone you love died and in a way, you feel they abandoned you. Or maybe you experienced the pain of your spouses' marital unfaithfulness. Or maybe you are going through a difficult time and wonder where God is, or where He went, because you feel alone and abandoned by Him. That's how these disciples felt, and how they needed Jesus to comfort them – just like you do, too. In fact, even Jesus felt abandoned once also – abandoned by His Father. Less than a day from this event, Jesus was on the cross crying out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Forsaken. Alone.

Finally, I think the disciples were especially...

Fearful

Psychologists have given names to almost every fear (or phobia) under the sun. I shared some of those with you a few weeks ago, but here's a few more. For example, if you have a fear of crowds – then you have *ochlophobia*. If you are afraid of the darkness – you have *nyctophobia*. You have *scopophobia* if you are afraid of being *looked at* by other people. Do you have a fear of failure? Then you have *kakorrhaphiophobia*. You have *monophobia* if you're afraid of loneliness. (*I understand that Kaleigh had such monophobia that she used a pick up line on a guy at SuperCuts...you'll have to ask her about that.*) You have *gamophobia* if you have a fear of marriage. If you are afraid of responsibility, you have *hypengyophobia*. If you have a fear of being ridiculed (being made fun of), you have *categelophobia*. Are you afraid of school? That's easy; you have *schoolphobia*. Wouldn't it be easier if they just used the word that you are afraid of for *all* these fears? Darkphobia, Marriagephobia, parentingphobia, workphobia! It would be so much easier than all those big words. Of course, if you are afraid of long words, that just means that I have *hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia* – the fear of long words. Does anyone else see the irony in that? If I have a fear of long words and if I'm going to describe that fear to you, I have to use a long word! Seems like a cruel joke by the psychiatrists that come up with these names.

If you have a fear of God you have *theophobia*. If you are afraid of death you have *thanatophobia*. *Hadephobia* is a fear of hell, which probably isn't a bad fear to have.

If you think about it, in all of those fears, often when we are afraid it's because of the unknown. We fear what we don't know and what we can't control. If you are moving to college in the fall, or to a city you've never been, there's fear. If you are getting a new job, there's fear that you won't do it right. "Cold feet" is a fear of how hard marriage might be. When we are facing divorce or the death of a spouse, we fear how we will make it alone. When we have cancer, we fear the treatments – or the outcome. When we face death, we are often afraid of the potential pain involved, and we are afraid if we don't know what's beyond death.

The disciples were afraid because they had come to a place that they didn't know. Jesus was leaving and they didn't know why, or where he was going, or what would happen to them. Suddenly everything was changing; it must have been very frightening.

It's amazing how many things we can be afraid of. The fact is, Jesus said that there *would* be frightening events in our lives. It is a part of life that we have to learn to deal with. But Jesus gives us answers even in the face of fear.

How do we deal with the failures and feelings of being forsaken and how do we deal with our fears? Jesus knew what the disciples were feeling and so He addressed all of them. The language indicates that Jesus began speaking to the whole group, not just Peter anymore. Jesus knew what they were feeling and He knows what we feel, so in His response we are given the...

2. ***Heart Treatment***

Jesus says that the treatment for all of the things that the disciples were feeling is: trust. *Trust in Christ is the treatment for a troubled heart!* It's what the prophet Isaiah comforted the people of Israel with when they were in exile. He said that...

God "...will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in (God). Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal."
(Isaiah 26:3-4, niv)

It's what the writer of Psalm 56 prayed when his enemies attacked him and his life was threatened. He said,

"When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (Psalm 56:3, 11, niv)

But in these few verses Jesus does more than just say, "Trust me." He gives us some wonderful and amazing reasons *why* we can trust Him.

Sometimes, when our boys were very little, they would begin to get anxious at bedtime, afraid that they might wake up and get scared in the middle of the night. So they would look to Shelly and I for reassurance that they were going to be okay, and ask, "If I wake up in the middle of the night, can I come into your room?" And in my compassionate way I would say, "Tough it out and learn to live with it!" Of course I didn't say that! We would tell our boys that everything would be all right, and then we would take a sleeping bag and lay it out at the foot of the bed. That way they knew that a place was waiting for them. And

usually, just knowing it was there, they would be able to fall deeply asleep and not worry or even wake up in the night.

With the statement Jesus makes, he is saying to us “when you’re afraid, it’s okay – there is something already laid out for you. Trust me.” He tells us this by first telling us to trust in...

Jesus’ *Person*

Hear what He says:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” (John 14:1)

He is saying, “You trust in God; well, you can trust in me too. We are One and the same. You can trust me.” He’s also saying, “You trust me now when I am with you; but when you *can’t* see me anymore you can *still* trust me. I’ll be with you. Don’t stop trusting me.”

We have always found it easier to trust in things that we can see and touch. We have a little bit of the disciple Thomas in us, don’t we? Remember when Thomas heard reports that Jesus had risen from the dead, he said:

“Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe it.” So Jesus showed him and he believed. Then Jesus said, “Thomas because you have seen me, now you believe. Blessed are those who have not seen and still they believe.” (Johns 20:29, niv)

Jesus is talking about us! He’s saying to you: trust me!

The truth is that the Bible teaches that the things we can see are the temporary things. The car that you drove to church in today is only temporary. Some cars are more temporary than others! This building is only temporary; if it’s still standing when Jesus comes back, it will soon be burned up to make way for the new heaven and new earth, and for a city that never fails or fades or gets old. By the way, that means this place is not sacred. This room is not a sacred place. This room is a place where sacred things happen. This room isn’t holy; what happens in this room when Jesus works in our lives – *that* is holy. The only indestructible “Holy Temple” that is here on earth is the heart of the believer!

Everything else will face decay and eventual destruction. I don’t have to convince you of that – just look in the mirror! We look in the mirror and see our aging bodies and we realize that even our bodies are temporary. Everything that you can currently see and touch is here for a little while then it’s gone. But the things you can’t see last forever.

You *know* that there is a more permanent place; you can *feel* it.

Dostoyevsky, the great Russian novelist said, “Surely I haven’t suffered simply that I may manure the soil of the future for someone else.”

This is a hard lesson to learn, isn’t it? But it’s an important lesson, because when we face troubles and difficulties in life, we need to remember that Jesus has promised that we can trust him, even and especially when we can’t see him.

Then in verse two we are told to trust in...

Jesus' *Promises*

These are some of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. Jesus says:

“In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with Me, that where I am you may be also.”
(John 14:2-3, niv)

God’s given many promises in both the Old and the New Testaments. He promised the children of Israel a land where there would be milk and honey. It took a while for the promise to be fulfilled – it was delayed because of their sin – but finally it was fulfilled. God promised a Messiah, and that took a long time, but it, too, was fulfilled at just the right time: Jesus the Savior was born. *Now* God promises that He is preparing a place for us. Someday we’ll be with Him forever and ever. Sometimes we grow impatient waiting for it, but the Bible says:

“You can trust in the promises of God. This promise will be fulfilled, too. The only reason he’s waiting is to make sure as many people as possible will accept Him so they can be there.” (2 Peter 3:9, the message)

By the way, that verse is important for another reason, which we’ll come back to.

The Bible uses a lot of different words to describe heaven. In one place it is called “a city” indicating the number of inhabitants. In another it’s called “a country” indicating the vastness of heaven. It is called “a kingdom” indicating that there is a governmental structure to it all. It is called “paradise” indicating its beauty and desirability. But *here* Jesus called it, “My Father’s house,” and that is another way of saying, “It is *home*.”

Home is a place where you can be yourself. Home is where you can take off your coat and kick off your shoes. Home is where you’re always accepted and loved; you’re not just a guest – you are a resident. You live there. That is home. Jesus is saying, “I’m going to take you to My Father’s house, and it will be your home, too. You’ll be a part of the family. You’ll be home where you belong.”

Notice too that Jesus says, “In My Father’s house are many rooms.” The King James version says, “many mansions.” We like *that* word: mansions. We want to think that we will have these huge castle estates; mansions on acres and acres of land. But “mansion” is not the best translation of the Greek work Jesus used. The best is “dwelling place” or “rooms.” We kind of selfishly want a place of our own, but this passage communicates more than a house; it is family. You won’t get a house of your own, but you will get a room in God’s house – which means you will be at home in his family.

There was a custom in Jesus’ day that is still around today. Shelly and I saw it when we visited Israel and Palestine. We would see these houses, and on many of them they were building another wing or another floor above. You see, the word that Jesus used comes from *that* custom; when a son grows up and gets married, he brings his bride back home again, and the father adds another room onto His house for them. Then when another son grows up and gets married, they add another room. The house just keeps getting bigger and bigger, as the family grows. So when Jesus says, “In My Father’s house there are many rooms. I am going to prepare them for you.” He’s saying, “We’re adding on to the house for

you.” It’s *God’s* house – and we get to have a room in it when we trust Jesus. And He’s indicating that the house is huge – there’s enough rooms for everyone!

Then He says “I’m coming back to take you so that you may be where I am.” Jesus *will* come back. It’s almost time! We’re almost there! Don’t become discouraged. Don’t become fainthearted. We’re almost there. But you don’t have to be in a hurry!

There was a little girl who came home from a day at Children’s Church and at the dinner table her brother asked her why she didn’t go up to the altar when they said, “All who want to go to heaven come up front.” She said, “Because I didn’t want to.” Her father was surprised, so explained to the girl: “Jesus lives in Heaven. Don’t you want to go to heaven and be with Jesus?” She said, “Well, of course, but not today!” We feel that way, too. But just stop and think about it: most of me is already there. My name is written there. My citizenship is there. My God is there. My Savior is there. My inheritance is there. Some of my loved ones are there. My home is there. So much of me is already there.

When God’s time is right it will all be fulfilled, and we’ll be in our Father’s house. We’ll get new bodies and we won’t have to worry about getting old and sick and all the other things that plague us here. “Trust My promises,” He says: the sleeping bag is already laid out; the room is already built! Best of all, we learn in this passage that we can trust...

Jesus’ *Presence*

Jesus said,

“If I go to prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:3)

When he says, “I will come again,” the more literal translation is that Jesus is saying, “*I AM* coming again.” It’s called a *prophetic present* – He’s not just talking about His second coming. He’s talking about an *always present* coming – he’s saying, “I AM continually coming to you. I AM with you.” Not “I was” or “I will be” but “I AM.” It’s both I AM with you and I will return again. It is the “now” and the “not yet.” It’s the same thing that Jesus said to the disciples after His resurrection and before He ascended into Heaven:

“Truthfully, *I am* with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

It’s the same promise that said:

“*I am* will never leave you or forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

It’s the same promise when He said,

“My Presence shall go with you.” (Exodus 33:14)

No matter what you are going through, you have the promise of His presence *now*. You can trust Him!

As you journey through this life, often filled with feelings of failure, feelings of being forsaken, and fear, you can trust Jesus – *He* is the treatment for a troubled heart. Take courage, trust in Jesus, and displace those feelings. And remember, that this life is *not* as good as it gets; this isn’t all there is.

But there's something else in this passage; even though we love to hear about being in heaven, there's an issue: we are still here! We are still here because Jesus tells us that we have a...

3. Heart *Task*

...to accomplish first. After comforting the troubled disciples and giving them the treatment for their troubles, he gives them the task that they are to accomplish. Remember that we saw that the Bible says that God isn't slow in keeping his promises; that he's waiting for as many as possible to be saved? Well, *that's why we are still here. We have a task of the heart to accomplish.* There are people who don't know that God loves them.

In this passage, Jesus says some amazing things about the works we have to do, and the power we will be given to do those things, and that we'll do even greater things than Jesus did, and that we can ask anything of Jesus and he will do it. But understand, those aren't promises so that you can be super human or so that you have an unlimited credit card drawn on God's vault. What Jesus is saying is that if we will not give in to troubles, take the treatment and get busy with the task making sure as many people get introduced to Jesus as possible, then God will provide everything we need in order to accomplish that task: because God loves every person on this planet, including and especially those who are outside of a relationship with him. He loves those who are refugees and poor and oppressed. He loves them all and wants them in relationship with him and with you, in his family. You and I have a heart task as long as we are still here and not in heaven. It is a labor of love; God's love in us, through Christ, means we love others so much that we want them to know Christ, too. So we will love people, we will introduce them to Jesus – no matter who they are or how bad off they are or how much different from us.

This earth is not our home. Our fleeting years here on earth are but a minuscule portion of our journey. There is another whole realm of life beyond this sphere in which we now exist. It is a place where God will make right all the wrongs of this life. It is a place where we will know life in all its richness and fullness. Heaven will be wonderful, beyond our wildest imaginations. But until then, no matter what fears, failures, or forsakenness you face, you can trust Jesus! You can trust his person, his promise, and his always-present presence! So please – until you die or until Jesus comes back – whichever comes first, make it your priority to love people from God's heart of love in you, and make and take every opportunity to introduce people to Jesus.

Pray