

D Wagstaff at Canterbury 11th June 2023, John 14:1-14

At this point in our service I'd like us to spend a little time thinking about journeys. Travelling from the place we're currently at to another place, somewhere else. Maybe there are some journeys we've made, recently or many years ago that particularly stick in our minds as memories, whether good or bad.

Even our coming to meet here in Church today involved going on a journey, perhaps on foot, walking or by car. Some journeys we look forward to, visiting friends or relatives, or going away to a holiday destination in the near future. Others, for example going to school, a visit to the dentist or hospital, we are not so keen on but they are a part of life and journeys that we have to make.

Sometimes we know exactly where we're going to; a beach, garden centre or a zoo... or perhaps to a friend's house. We may already know the way, can pinpoint the location or have the address and town. At other times we only know who we're going with, maybe some friends or our family and just have to trust them, that they know the way to go, to get us there.

As a 12 year old I went on a very long journey with one of my Mum's friends. She was Scottish, had moved to Japan and got married there. On this occasion she was back for a holiday and after visiting us in Faversham was going to drive up to Scotland to visit her brother. It was the summer holidays; she had asked if I would like to go with her and said we could tour around and get to see some of the beautiful scenery. What a journey that was, it was a very long way! I knew roughly where we were going, North of Edinburgh to Kirkcaldy but I didn't know any of the people we would meet there. We went on to Inverness and visited some of the lochs. It was, for me, a very memorable 2 weeks away.

Jesus' disciples had known him for three years, and during that time he had led them on a journey. They went from the Sea of Galilee and the surrounding area, wandering from one place to another, mainly walking but sometimes by boat. In that time they had learned so much from him, seen the miracles and heard his teaching about the Kingdom of God.

When we have our reading later from John's gospel you'll hear that Jesus is intending to go on another journey... and this time it is a journey without his disciples. They're in Jerusalem and suddenly He announces to them that he is going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them and will come back and take them to be with him. Then he says a strange thing; "You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas immediately replies, "Lord we don't know where you're going, so how can you say we know the way?" And Jesus answers him, "*am* the way... no one comes to the Father except through me."

The Christian life is also a journey. Knowing Jesus as our Saviour and Lord is the starting point, that moment when we repent before God and trust him for the forgiveness of our sins. It's a new life, with him walking beside us and there's a loving relationship with God as our heavenly Father. Jesus knows the path our life will take. He is the Way and if we are willing to submit to his will, he will lead and guide us day by day. In Jeremiah 29:11 God says to the exiles who are living far

away from the land of Israel, “For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God has plans for our lives too. Let us place our confidence and full trust in Him, that He will lead us in our journey. As we spend time with Him each day in prayer and allow his Holy Spirit to teach us, giving us understanding of the message we read in the Bible he will write it upon our hearts and apply it to our lives. Amen

Main Sermon

Our reading today from the Gospel of John was only 14 verses in length... but it is jam-packed with so many thoughts on subjects that are worthy of our careful consideration. I propose therefore to work my way through this passage, verse by verse, and comment upon the points which come up.

And so, we begin with Jesus’ words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Having not read from the previous chapter this morning, we may well find ourselves asking, “*Why* would their hearts be troubled?” I find it’s often good to look around a verse, before and after it, to understand it better in its context. The answer to our question lies in the verses of John 13 where Jesus told His disciples that one of them was going to betray Him. He said “I will be with you only a little longer.” To recap, Simon Peter had then asked him, “Where are you going” and Jesus replied, “Where I am going you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” Peter responded, “Why not now? I will lay down my life for you.” But Jesus challenges him, asking, “Will you really? Before the cock crows you will disown and deny knowing me three times!”

That was quite a rebuke from Jesus. Peter has always been the rather impulsive one, speaking out and doing things without thinking them through properly. It must have hit Peter hard and also come as a shock to the others who heard this conversation. With hindsight and having the Bible as a record, we know Jesus was correct... that once he had been arrested, his disciples were left defenceless like sheep without a shepherd. With no-one to lead them each had done what was right in their own eyes, they scattered and sought to protect their own lives as best they could until the present danger had passed.

But at this moment in time the disciples only know that someone, one from among their number, will betray Jesus and that he will only be with them for a little longer. So, they *do* have a lot to be worried and troubled about... Let’s face it, only a few days before, they had probably thought the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, was a precursor to the coming of God’s kingdom on earth, the gaining of their long-awaited freedom from Roman oppression and the commencement of a wonderful era of blessing with Jesus as their leader and King. It’s clearly not going that way, things aren’t going right, in fact it’s beginning to look very bad... there is almost certainly trouble ahead. Jesus knows *exactly* what is troubling their hearts and minds right now.

At this time of uncertainty which they are facing He gives them a clear instruction, “Trust in God; trust also in me.” If we stop to think about it, the opposite of trust is fear and doubt. Both rob us of our peace of heart and mind, and also take away our

confidence for the future. Who *can* we trust? In whom does our hope lie? David the writer of Psalm 56 had been seized by the feared Philistines in Gath but says with confidence, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid.”

In Philippians 4:6-7 Paul writes, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” And in Matthew 6:34 Jesus said, “... do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” How true *that* is!

Jesus continues by saying, “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.” We thought briefly about this journey earlier and Jesus’ promise to come back to take them to be with him. He says to them, “You know the way to the place where I am going.” And when Thomas queries this, he answers, “I *am* the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.” If we were to stand outside in the street and ask several people, “which is the right way to God?” we would probably receive a myriad of answers. A popular response I have heard is that we all worship the same God really, in our different ways and that, so long as we do good in our lives, the best we can, God knows and it doesn’t matter which religion we choose to follow. The Bible puts it very differently: Proverbs 14:12 tells us, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Jesus, by his choice of words, clearly states that *he* is the only way and that no-one comes to the Father, except through him. We have a personal relationship with our God.

Back in John 6, Jesus whilst speaking to the Jews said, “No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ (Isaiah 54:13) Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes *has* everlasting life. I *am* the bread of life.”

He also says to them, “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” Philip’s response is quite understandable, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” They can see Jesus physically before them, but just as a man, one whom they have gradually come to know better and now acknowledge as being the Son of God. They do not yet perceive Jesus to be the representation of the one true God. Paul in his letter to the Colossians (1:15) writes, “He is the image of the invisible God.” and later (2:9) says, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”

In our passage, Jesus responds to Philip’s request to show them the Father, by asking, “Don’t you know me, 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?”

In John 10:30, on a previous visit to Jerusalem during the Feast of Dedication, Jesus had said, “I and the Father are one.” At that time he was in the temple area

and the Jews who were gathered around him clearly understood the full meaning of what he was saying. They immediately picked up stones in order to kill him because he, a mere man, was claiming to be God. He went on to state, “*I am* God’s Son. Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”

Jesus then goes on to explain, “The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. If we go back and read from the beginning of John’s Gospel, the following selection of verses perhaps now speak much more clearly; certainly they have done so for me... “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made;” “In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” “The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No-one has ever seen God, but God the only [Son], who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

“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 miracles themselves.” Is it just me... I think I can hear a hint of exasperation in Jesus words: “*at least believe on the evidence...*” It seems that the disciples, who have had the unique experience of seeing and sharing in Jesus’ life first-hand, by living and walking alongside him for the last three years, have heard his teaching and witnessed the many miracles take place... but still do not fully comprehend and perceive just *who* he really is. Although we have the benefit of being able to read a vast wealth of evidence pointing to exactly *who* Jesus is, written down and contained within our Bible, how well do we know the truths that are contained in it? When we stop and take some time out from our busy lives to quietly read the Bible, do we pray beforehand, asking God to teach and give us the understanding of it by his Holy Spirit? He will write his words upon our hearts and bring them to mind at the right time, as the need arises.

As we draw near to the end of our passage for today, we come to some of the most difficult verses: If taken literally they are a challenge to us personally and to the Church as we know it. Jesus said “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” What? *Anyone!* How could we, mere humans, do greater things than Jesus? After all, he was God! But when Jesus went to the Father, he sent another Comforter, the Holy Spirit who enables us to do all he wishes to accomplish through us, if only we will wait on him and be obedient to his leading. It’s interesting that when Jesus fed the five thousand, their physical need for food was met but it says the great crowd had only “followed him to that place because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.” We read of them subsequently following after him as he crossed the water to Capernaum where he challenged them saying, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”

Certainly Peter and Paul were enabled by God to do some pretty special things... around 3,000 people turned to the Lord on the Day of Pentecost and were baptised following Peter's sermon, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Peter had been transformed from a frightened man who denied knowing Jesus 3 times in one night, to one who stood up fearlessly and addressed a great crowd. And Paul who had been trained in and knew the Hebrew Scriptures so very well was equipped and enabled by our God, through the power and prompting of the Holy Spirit, to travel extensively in his missionary journeys, ministering and reaching out to both Jews and Gentiles with the Good News of salvation, and this to be found *only* in Jesus Christ. But Jesus didn't just say *some*, just one or two *who are especially blessed* but "*anyone* who has faith *in me will* do what I have been doing." Whilst this is a daily reality for some Christian believers, in and through whom our God is clearly very much at work, it is true that elsewhere, and especially in our own land, many appear to be, "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." (2 Timothy 3:5) In Romans 12:3-6a Paul wrote, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body..." "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." Whatever the gift or ability our God has equipped us with, may we be guided in its use by his Holy Spirit so that in all we do we may always serve and honour him well, not taking any glory to ourselves.

"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father." Wow! Do you realise Jesus is in effect giving them, and us, a Power of Attorney to act *in his name*, doing what he himself would have done in any given situation and with all his resources at our disposal. Someone holding a Power of Attorney must not use it for his own benefit but only to fulfil the wishes of the Donor by acting on his behalf and under his authority and any he has instructions given. We know Jesus himself would be choosing to do those things that "may bring glory to the Father" and it is that same motivation which should be behind the requests we make of him. He said, "You may ask me for *anything* in my name, and I will do it."

So, do not abuse his promise by greedily trying to gain things for yourself but instead ask of him in humility, seeking out what our God's will is, for he "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." (Ephesians 3:20)

As I was prayerfully reflecting this morning, God brought it to my attention that this passage is not just a random collection of thoughts. Instead it is a compilation of the most important things he wanted us and the disciples to learn from and remember. Jesus would only be with them a short while longer...

Let us seek daily to walk ever more closely with him, acting in obedience to his revealed will for us, and increasingly may we become more available for our God to use! Like Jesus, may we bring glory to the Father, through our lives spent in service of him. Amen