

“The Way, the Truth, the Life”

May 18, 2014

John 14: 1-14

1 "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves. 12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; 14 if you ask anything in my name, I will do it. (RSV)

The concept of God and Jesus as different forms of water as I shared with our youth today is not a new illustration and in fact if I had something hot here I could easily produce vaporous steam which would be the representation of the Holy Spirit. Water, which is one of the few substances that can take multiple forms, and in our faith case we can easily see it is living water, is a tangible expression of a difficult concept that we do not often explore. The relationship of God and Jesus. Whatever way we look at it today's scripture and our understanding of Jesus in relationship to God expects a lot of faith out of us. We in trying to understand in our limited human view will come up against things that we can not comprehend and that is where faith becomes the cornerstone for every possible explanation.

Faith however can be tricky. We can not blindly follow anything and anyone whom we meet and whom we are introduced to in our lives. At some point in our faith journeys we have to move beyond our embedded theology. This embedded theology is a theological term that means how we grew up and how we were indoctrinated in our faith understandings. To better understand this take the fact that some of us grew up Baptist, or Methodist, or Presbyterian or whatever. We were raised in a particular way and with a particular frame of reference or lens from which we will always in some ways pull from in looking at everything to do with our faith.

However, we, the further we progress on our faith journeys, can not blindly accept that the teachings of anyone interpreting and exegeting the scriptures and the practices of our faith understanding is always 100% accurate. Even in the teachings of our ministers and other spiritual authorities. Most of us will willingly and readily admit to not always having a 100% correct interpretation. In fact I recently preached on this exact same scripture pericopy during the season of Lent. We studied this scripture through a particular lens that of the lens of colors of faith and this one in particular was about yellow and the representation of the promise of Christ being with us and represented by us. That though is just one way of looking at this particular portion of the Gospel of John. Understanding that this is just one way and today we are exploring another is better forcing us into the theological understanding of Deliberative Theology. Deliberative theology expands our embedded theology and asks us what do we believe.

To better understand the theological concepts of embedded and deliberative theologies it is helpful to view it in this way. (Pull out handy white board again) Embedded theology is handed down to us from our authorities when we are young and even as we are older. It is very linear because the expectation is that the authority is correct. When we however begin to ask questions and look for and search for answers we enter into the realm of our Deliberative theology which is more circular in nature because it will always filter through the lens of our embedded theologies no matter how removed we might be from it.

(Embedded Theology+ thought +experience +deliberation +education=Deliberative Theology)

Today, however in our further deliberation of our scriptural understanding of the Gospel of John, we are focusing on another part of our scripture than what we did before. Jesus says “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” This is another glaringly familiar verse out of the Gospel of John. All Gospels have a particular slant and angle. The Gospel of John’s angle is theological and asks us to believe in Jesus. In fact in John 20:31 we are given the clearest picture of the Gospel of John. The verse reads “that you may believe in Jesus as the Christ the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” Belief in the life and works of Jesus have led us to do and act in particular ways as part of our embedded and deliberative theologies. A lot of trends come and go in our faith. I should hope we are acquainted with WWJD, what would Jesus do, and WDJJ, what did Jesus do but I give us another question to think about and ponder upon: what did Jesus mean? It can be difficult enough in our modern understanding to try to interpret and exegete from our scriptures what we are supposed to live out in our faith but take a step back and imagine the Disciples of this time trying to understand this living breathing enigma in front of them. Particularly when he said things that were outside of the norm and John’s Gospel often emphasizes some of Jesus’ more radical acts.

Granted that we would hope that the Disciples by this point would be used to the abnormal and radical Jesus after living and being with him and following him. But as we are wont to do we often dismiss what is right in front of our faces and our eyes until our blindfolds have been ripped off and we are finally able to see the truth of such a statement. One of our most treasured hymns has in it the line “I once was blind but now I see”. There is a fantastic book out there, a classic, entitled “Black Beauty” written by Anna Sewell and written in the perspective of the horse named “Black Beauty”. There is a vivid image of the horse meeting another and asking why the horse wears blinders. Those unfamiliar with horse equipment can work with me on blinders being a part of the harness that prevents a horse from looking anywhere other than straight ahead of them. The horse’s response is that they have always worn them and they would be afraid to take them off because their perception would be so different from what they have always known.

We like the horse and like the Disciples get very comfortable in our embedded theological understandings. To be deliberative is oftentimes difficult and leads us time and time again to questions that do not always have consistent or even consciously plausible answers. Many will then instead of going and continuing onward will just fall back on our embedded theology because it is easier. We are like that horse unwilling to take the blinders off because it would expect too much today to ask us to do what Jesus asked his Disciples to do when he said follow me. Faith is not simple, faith is not easy. Faith my friends is demanding of us to give our all for the one who gave his all. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and life no one gets to the Father except through him.

Jesus my friends should be our embedded theological lens. As Disciples we fall back on this statement most often “No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible”. But even we get caught in the weary webs of Church structure and comfort of how things are is how they should always be. But let us consider who we are following. We are following a radical Jewish man who did not say or accept that the way things had always been done is the way they needed to continue we are following a Jesus who turned a lot of embedded theologies of the Jewish people on their heads and said they needed to shift their theological paradigms. We are following a Jesus who is the Life, the Truth, and the Way. Amen.