



St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene
The Reverend Glenda Empsall, Deacon

[Acts 7:55-60](#), [1 Peter 2:2-10](#), [John 14:1-14](#), [Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16](#)

Good and gracious One, may we be strengthened with constant reminders of your love. May we abide in Jesus as he abides in you. Amen.

Have you ever had a friend, a good friend, maybe a best friend, someone with whom you enjoy hanging out, doing and discussing all kinds of things; BUT that friend's powers of perception, their experiences, their world views, perhaps their intellect, too, were so different than your own, that there would be times when, even though you loved them and they loved you; even though you were both speaking the same language, you could not quite grasp what your friend was trying to tell you? I think that may be what is happening between the disciples and Jesus in this gospel reading.

Chapters 14–17 of the Gospel according to John are known as Jesus' "Farewell Discourse" delivered to eleven of his disciples. It begins after the Last Supper in Jerusalem; the night before Jesus' crucifixion. It may not surprise you that verses 1-6 of John 14 are suggested in the Book of Common Prayer as an appropriate gospel reading for funeral services.¹ These are reassuring words of comfort for grieving family and friends and for anxious disciples.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. 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?"

Apparently Jesus' words are comforting, unless you are Thomas the literalist, "Where is God's house and how do we find it if you don't give us directions and if we aren't going there with you?" We might also wonder, if there are many dwelling places [some translations say "rooms" or "mansions"], does any and everyone get a place to live – or is it a gated community? If you believe in an expansive, inclusive Jesus, you may take issue with Jesus' words in response to Thomas.

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."

This verse has at times been used as threat, "accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior" or it's that hot place for you [and I'm not talking about Arizona!]. According to one of the commentaries I read, "To interpret the verse this way is to rip it from its context and do violence to the spirit of Jesus' words... Jesus himself is all they need; there is no need to panic, no need to search desperately for a secret map. *"If you know me (and you do), you will know my father also."*"² So that there can be no mistaking,

¹ BCP, pg. 480 (Burial I) and pg. 495 (Burial II)

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/authors/elisabeth-johnson>, 5/14/2017.

Jesus adds, *“From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

Philip still wants visual proof *“Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”* Can you hear Jesus’ deep sigh? *“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. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.”*

If the disciples couldn’t understand Jesus’ father/son relationship, they at least had to know how Jesus loved all people and helped everyone; and then believed that Jesus was who he said he was because of the works he had done; miracles the disciples and others witnessed. For about three years, Jesus had been teaching, preaching, curing lepers, healing the lame, the blind, and the demon-possessed, raising people from death to life. The words Jesus spoke and the works that he did, came from God and show us who God is.

Jesus then entrusted his mission to the disciples, *“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”*

You and I know the pain of praying for healing that did not come, of feeling helpless and abandoned. Why were our prayers not answered? Were our prayers not fervent enough? Not good enough? Perhaps the real difficulty is in understanding what Jesus promised. We expect to do greater works the way Jesus did them; with miraculous power that instantly solves the problem.³ Prayer does not always bring immediate gratification. Sometimes the answer is, “Not yet.”

We aren’t Jesus. We have not seen Jesus perform miracles. We often have trouble recognizing miracles that are in plain sight. May I suggest that we change our perspective as to what constitutes a “miracle?” The sun came up this morning. We woke up and got out of bed – some more slowly than others – but here we are! Our hearts are beating. There is new life. Trees are budding. Flowers are blooming. Birds are singing. Our daughter-in-law is ‘expecting.’ All of those things are miracles!

Yes, we know that not all is right with the world. And we know that IF we could join together as Jesus’ hands and feet in the world, believing in the promise, we can begin to make a difference. “No one can do everything. Everyone can do something.”⁴ How might we show others the very heart of God? What are you already doing and what else might you do? At a minimum, please pray. If necessary, use words.

Lord, may we be enfolded in your grace, borne by your love, and steadied by the knowledge of your abiding presence. Give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

³ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-john-141-14-4>

⁴ DOK (Daughters of the King) motto.