

John 14:1-14

One day, I was driving through a town, and I noticed something interesting about the vehicle in front of me. When both of our vehicles stopped for a traffic light, I could see that the vehicle before me was a Jeep Compass. I had not noticed this before, but the symbol for the Compass is a circle surrounded by 4 arrows pointing to the north, south, east and west. This interaction occurred shortly after Easter, which may have helped stir my thoughts. Because, seeing the symbol brought another image to my mind--If one could elongate each of the arrows, making the south arrow twice the length of the other arrows, one would see a cross.

As you will note while reading my sermon, both of these images bear significance in our pericope today: the compass and the cross.

Our gospel passage takes us back to a time after Jesus washed the disciples' feet and before Jesus' trial. We find that the disciples are disturbed. They have heard the predictions of the betrayal, Jesus' departure, and Peter's denial. (Wansbrough, Jerusalem Bible, p. 1777) They are not only disturbed, but they are deeply troubled. What will they do without Jesus? How can they continue his work without him? Jesus has been their teacher, their mentor, their guide, their friend. They do not want their relationship with Jesus to end.

Jesus says to them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." (v. 14:1)

What does Jesus mean? They do believe in Jesus, but that is not what is troubling them. They want to be with Jesus. How can they continue to be with Jesus?

Jesus says, "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." (v. 4:2)

Perhaps the disciples are thinking...now we are making progress! Jesus wants to be with

us! Jesus is going to prepare a place for us!..... But Jesus is not referring to a house, or even a physical location. He is referring to a relationship. Jesus is going to "prepare a place" for them, by "mediating a relationship between God and the disciples." (Neyrey, New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 1906)

God and Jesus have been in relationship one with another, for all eternity. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are one Triune God. The incarnate Jesus is fully divine and fully human. As God-person, Jesus was sent to earth to do God's will. God the Father was angry because of the sinfulness of human beings. God the Father sent Jesus to earth to meet sinful human beings where they are and to be in relationship with them. As such, Jesus experienced the joys and sorrows of being in relationship with human beings. He taught, preached, prayed, healed, cared for, and corrected them. And through his ministry many people came to know and love Jesus. Yet, some human beings betrayed, condemned, mocked, taunted and nailed him to a cross.

Jesus established relationships with human beings, so they would learn about God. He came to earth to rescue humankind from the wages of sin and death. For in knowing Jesus, they would also know the Father. And in believing in Jesus, Jesus would mediate for them so they could be with the Father.

Jesus said to the disciples, "And you know the way to the place where I am going." (v. 14:4)

Thomas, still disturbed and troubled replied, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way." (v. 14:5) For Thomas was still thinking of a physical dwelling, a place, an exact location where Jesus was going. He wanted to be sure that the disciples knew where they could find Jesus. He wanted clear, precise directions, so they could always be with

Jesus.

Perhaps some of us have had similar feelings when we have heard that a friend is leaving us. We want to keep our relationship with them so much, that we take extra care to get the exact address where they will be. We get out a map to identify where their new home is located, finding the state, the city, the street, and their house. We Google Mapquest or program our GPS. We use whatever resources it takes to be sure that we can find them.

Perhaps the disciples needed a compass. This compass (like the symbol mentioned earlier) has a circle, like the world, and arrows pointing in all four directions. But, there were no compasses in Jesus' day, and no map could lead them to where Jesus was going. Even the North Star would have been of no help. The disciples could walk to the ends of the earth, yet they would not find a physical location for where Jesus was going. For to find Jesus, to find God the Father, to find the one, Triune God, they must move away from human thinking to spiritual thinking. They must focus on Jesus and Jesus' words, "Believe in God, believe also in me." (v. 14:1)

What then is required of them? Placing their faith and trust in God. Jesus said to the disciples, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (v. 14:6)

Jesus, the mediator and guide, is the compass to the Father. For Jesus and God the Father, are one. All the disciples need to do is to believe in Jesus.

But Philip is still troubled. He doesn't understand. Philip says, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied." (v. 14:8) Jesus replies, "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?" (v. 14:10)

The incarnate Son, Jesus of Nazareth, is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is going to the Father, not in an earthly sense, but in a spiritual sense. He is going to mediate a relationship with God and the disciples. Jesus says,

¹¹"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. ¹²Very 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. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it." (NRSV)

Jesus' relationship with the Father, their oneness, is for all eternity. But Jesus' earthly relationship with the disciples is nearing its end. In order to atone for the sins of all humanity, Jesus, the incarnate Son, must die on the cross. But his death is not the end of their relationship. For Jesus will be resurrected and ascend to heaven to be at the right hand of the Father. Jesus will be at the right hand of the power of God. If the disciples believe in Jesus, they will experience God's forgiveness and grace. For Jesus' death brings new life for those who believe in him. Jesus the teacher, mentor, and guide for the disciples, has prepared them for their future role. They are to carry on the works that Jesus has taught them, baptizing others in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If they ask for anything in Jesus' name for the sake of God's kingdom, Jesus will do it and the Father will be glorified.

The compass and the cross. The foreshadowing of Jesus' death on the cross is unfolding in these verses. Jesus is the compass that directs the disciples, and us, to God the Father. Jesus mediates for the disciples, and us, a relationship with God the Father. Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, are the means by which all who believe in him past, present, and future, may

experience new life with him.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The disciples do not need to travel anywhere. They do not need to look any further than Jesus the God-person, who is standing in front of them. When they see Jesus, they see God. When we hear Jesus' words, we hear God. When we teach, mentor, guide, and care for others in Jesus' name, we continue Jesus' work on earth, not for merit, but to do God's will. For Jesus is the compass that directs us to God the Father, and Jesus' death on the cross opens the way to salvation and new life for those who believe in him. God's grace is poured out for us and for all Christian believers, through Jesus' actions.

At this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic when we are Safer-At-Home, we are reminded of how desperately we need God. It seems that each day we are confronted with more unsettling news about the virus, its longevity, its effects, and the ramifications that it may have on our lives. Yet, like the disciples and all believers, we come to the Father not by looking for God in a special location, but by being in relationship with God. We read about Jesus in the Bible and his mighty words and deeds. We pray to Jesus and ask him to guide us to know the one, Triune God. Jesus, who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Jesus the compass. Jesus whose death on the cross gave us forgiveness of sins, the gift of salvation, and the hope of eternal life forever with God. Thanks be to God for God's amazing love. Amen.