

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Sunday, May 14, 2017, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: John 14:1-14

"Jesus Is The Only Way"

Today is a day of celebration. We celebrate one of the greatest gifts – our mothers. It is an undeniable fact that someone carried each one of us for nine months – until we were ready to face this world. There is not one person in this room; there is not one person in this world that has not been carried – to be born and to follow God. For many there was someone who held us in the middle of the night when we were scared from a dream, or had a fever and couldn't sleep. Sometimes they are different people – but nonetheless a mother – who cared deeply about the child in their arms. We give thanks today for all women and especially for the women who gave us life – the women who gave us love. And so - Happy Mother's Day!

Today's Holy Gospel recalls for us another type of celebration. Jesus and His apostles are in the upper room where they have eaten the Passover meal together. We are once again at the Last Supper. Jesus knew what the next few hours would bring; He knew that Judas was going to betray Him; He knew about the trials; and how troubled and scared His friends the apostles would be. He knew of pain on the cross, the freedom it would bring for mankind, and He knew about the borrowed tomb. Jesus tried to lovingly prepare the apostles for all of that and so He begins to comfort their troubled hearts.

Jesus begins to tell them in this fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John that they need to trust Him no matter what. Listen to Jesus' words in verse 1. *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, Trust also in Me."* Jesus is saying, "I know you trust in God, and you can also trust in Me." He is also telling them to "remember, when you can no longer see Me, don't stop trusting in Me." Isn't it always easier to trust in things that we can see and touch? It was Thomas who said, *"Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it."* So Jesus shows him and because of that - he believes. Jesus then said, *"Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Jesus is talking about us!

The Bible teaches us that the things we can see are only temporary. The car, in which you drove to church today, if it is still where you parked it, is temporary. This building, the pews on which you are sitting, this pulpit - all are temporary. All are subject to decay. I don't know about you but when we look in the mirror and see our aging and changing bodies, and realize that they are temporary, too. All the things you can see and touch are only here for a little while and then are gone. But the things you can't see, like love, last forever.

Verse 2 begins 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 you also may be where I am."* (John 14:2-3) God gave so many promises both in the Old and the New Testaments. He promised the children of Israel a land which would be filled with

milk and honey. It took a while for the promise to be fulfilled, but finally it was fulfilled. He promised a Messiah, and that took a long time. But it, too, was fulfilled. Jesus of Nazareth, our Savior was born, and that took a long time too. Now God promises that He is coming back for us. Someday we'll be with Him forever and ever. Sometimes we grow impatient, but the Scripture says, "*You can trust in the promises of God. This promise will be fulfilled, too.*"

Heaven is described in many ways throughout Holy Scripture. Here it is called, "*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 tie or jacket, put on a comfortable sweater or shorts, and kick off your shoes. Home is where you can say what you are thinking. Home is where you're always accepted and loved. You're not just a guest. 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." He also says "I am going to prepare the many rooms for you. I'm coming back to take you so that you may be where I am." If you think about it we're almost there. Soon 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 continually trouble us here. "*Trust My promises,*" Jesus says.

In verse 4 Jesus says, "*You know the way to the place where I am going.*" And so Thomas, good old bold Thomas, who speaks his mind, and says to Him, "*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*" Jesus answered some words that I believe are a cornerstone of the faith: "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" Jesus is saying, "I'm not just going to show you the way, or tell you the way, or give you a GPS to show you how to get there. I'm going to come and take you by the hand to My Father's house. Then you'll be home!" "I AM THEWAY!" Jesus then continues by assuring them "*If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.*"

Sadly some people have said "how dare Jesus say that?" or "How dare John put these words in His mouth?" Incredibly there are Christians who reject the uniqueness of Jesus as being the ONLY way. They are more worried about what to say that is "politically correct" to their non-Christian friends than how they should present the Gospel to them. I want to suggest to you that the problem with that way of thinking is – if you 'dethrone' Jesus – then you 'enthroned' someone or something else! If you take Jesus off the throne by saying 'He is not God – I don't believe any of the words that He said' then you are putting someone or something on the throne in His place. That is dangerous! The argument that all religions are really the same sounds "nice and democratic" but the fact is – that is absolutely untrue. By lumping the religious leaders together, as many do – you are saying that Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, Moses, and the others don't give us direct access to the divine. What you are saying is that each provides a way to the 'foothills' – and not the WAY to the 'summit!' You are dethroning Him,

By neutering Jesus in this way – you negate and neuter the entire New Testament and all of early Christianity which insists that the One True Living God is the Creator, and the God of Israel. The Apostle John put it plainly right in the very beginning of his Gospel. *“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; without him nothing was made that has been made.”* (John 1:1-3) The God of Israel has acted decisively to rescue mankind from itself and to negate the Son of the God of Israel and His mission is grasping some kind of vague general truth in which all religions bear some kind of witness – to do that is totally foreign to Christianity! It is total un-truth! Let me repeat the words that Jesus said in John 14:6 – He said *“I am the way and the truth and the life.”*

The real answer is that the truth and the life is Jesus Himself; the same Jesus who washed His disciples feet and told them to follow His example; who humbled Himself – in that *“while we were yet sinners, Jesus Christ died for us.”* The Jesus who was about to be on His way to give His life for His sheep; how can the world call this arrogant and self-serving?

My brothers and sisters in Christ - whatever your burdens are this morning, the solution to a troubled heart is still the same – to trust in Him. Jesus said that He would never leave us or forsake us. Then we need to trust in His promises: when everything seems dark and gloomy, when everything seems to be falling apart, remember His promises – and never forget how important you are to Him; so much so that He would die for you! Do you know any friends like that? I do – and again His Name is Jesus – that He would take my place – willingly climbing upon the cross; nobody put Him there! He kept His mouth shut during the trials; He let others do the talking and He willingly gave Himself.

Trust in Jesus, in His words - He is the Way – and I promise you - you will not get lost. He wants to take you by the hand and lead you to His Father’s house. He wants an everlasting relationship with each of us. Words that come right to my heart are taken from Jesus in the Book of Revelation 3:20 – Jesus says *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”* In last week’s sermon I challenged you to stop talking and listen; listen to what He has to say to you; listen for His voice. And so now it is up to us. Jesus invites each one of us this morning, and He waits for us to respond to His eternal invitation. He is the Way, He is the Truth, and He is the Life. He is the Way to Heaven; He is the “Alethea” the Greek word for Truth. There are no lies! Every single “red letter” in the Bible is true. Either you believe what Jesus said – or you call Him a liar. I would rather believe every word He says. I look forward to the day when I close my eyes and He takes my hand and carries me to ‘our Father’s house.’