

Text: John 14:23-29

A transition is coming. A change.

When we know change is coming, we do our best, most of the time, to prepare those we are concerned about for it. When mommy and daddy know another baby is coming, they spend a lot of time preparing the other children in the family for the changes that will come. And when an end to this earthly life is coming (sooner or later), we prepare loved ones in advance as best we can, hoping to lessen the burden on their hearts that we know grief will bring.

You know of other transition times we go through – from changing jobs to changing homes, from going away to coming back. We try to make these transitions as easy as we can for those we love. Sometimes it's by taking care of things ahead of time. Sometimes it's by letting them know as much as we can about what to expect.

Jesus knows that change is coming for his disciples, but only he knows how soon it is coming and how urgent it is that he prepare them. In this last part of Jesus' farewell discourse he has answered three of the disciples' questions; questions, perhaps, that have lingered with them over the past three years of their ministry together. Questions that we, looking at them two thousand years later, wonder how they can even ask:

From Thomas: *"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"* (Joh 14:5 NRS)

From Philip: *"Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."* (Joh 14:8 NRS)

And from Judas (not Iscariot): *"Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?"* (Joh 14:22 NRS)

The disciples still have lingering questions, even though they have spent roughly the last three years with Jesus, listening to his teaching both amidst the crowds who gathered to hear him and in their small circle.

There are always more questions, it seems – for the disciples, and for us. Whether we might want more teaching, more time – or whether we want more of Jesus' teachings and life on earth *written down* for us. We know there WAS more – John writes at the end of his book, *"But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."* (Joh 21:25-1 NRS) But even if we could somehow time-travel and could be there with the other disciples sitting there with Jesus on that day, would we know the questions to ask him that would seem so important today?

After all their time in ministry together, some of the disciples still have questions – they are having a hard time understanding all of this, having difficulty changing their perspectives from that of the world to that of God.

They are, after all, created earthly creatures, and it seems the communication gap between them and Jesus, coming at them from a heavenly perspective, is magnified here in these exchanges.

Thomas doesn't know where Jesus is going – is he talking about the next place he will visit? Is he talking about going to Heaven? What is the place he is going to in order to prepare a place for them there? And if he doesn't leave specific directions, how will they know how to get there if he's not there personally to lead them?

Jesus answers "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." (Joh 14:6-7 NRS) Jesus himself is the way to that place, that place where the Father is. It's not so much that they will physically follow Jesus there, literally follow in his footsteps right up that celestial staircase – but their *believing* in Jesus as the Son of God is their ticket to bring them there. You can't go someplace you don't believe in.

And poor Philip still doesn't get it, even though Jesus has just said it. He wants Jesus to *show* them the Father. What could Philip have expected for an answer? Even as he asks to be shown the Father he is looking right at Him, right then and there! Jesus answers, sounding a little exasperated, "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'? ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me..." (Joh 14:9-11 NRS)

This is one of the places in scripture where we get the basis for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. So far we have the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father.

Soon Jesus will introduce the idea of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. We cannot see the Father – Jesus says the Father is greater, in the Greek, *meigon* ("meg-non") – *the mega-God* – but since Jesus is the manifestation of God to us, we *can* see Him. And he looks like us.

And then Judas throws in his question: "*Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?*" On one level, he wants to know, "What keeps the rest of the world from knowing you like we do?" But on another level, he seems to ask, "Why us?"

But here, Jesus' answer is not so straightforward as to Thomas and Philip. "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me." (Joh 14:23-24 NRS)

If Judas were concerned about Jesus answering the question asked and ONLY the question asked, he would be saying, “But that’s not what I asked you.”

If it were the game of Jeopardy, the question might have been, “How will it be for those who love you?” – not the question Judas asked.

But did Jesus answer the question after all?

Judas asked how is it that only some believe (like themselves – or at least the other eleven disciples) but others don’t. Jesus responds that “those who love me will keep my word.” The disciples are among those who love Jesus and keep his word, but with the word “those” Jesus is really opening it up to anyone who hears his word and believes. That could include his other followers, the early Christians, all of Jesus’ followers right on up to us, and even beyond us into the future.

If we love Jesus, we will keep his word. And keeping his word doesn’t mean keeping it all to ourselves – it means keeping it pure and passing it along to others. Not everyone heard Jesus’ words straight from Jesus like the first disciples did. So how would others know?

Jesus answers that too. Those who keep his word are those that, in accordance with his word, spread the good news to others. That is how the early Christians came to believe, and in keeping that word, the same message of the Gospel has been handed across generations.

Sounds like a big job – with serious consequences if it’s not carried out! But Jesus has reassurance for all his disciples through the ages: we won’t have to do it on our own, but we will have the Holy Spirit with us and in us to teach us what to do and help us remember all Jesus has taught us. We will have Jesus’ peace with us – so we don’t have to be anxious about how well we can do it.

Jesus’ disciples had become accustomed to the transient ministry of following Jesus as he went from community to community and doing what he told them to do. Certainly they were content and satisfied with the way that had been going, or they would no longer be his disciples. Any of them could have decided to go home and take up their old lives.

But what if Jesus, their leader, were taken out of the picture?

Jesus might say to them, “If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father,” but I suspect that all this talk about leaving was raising the anxiety level significantly.

Who would tell them what to do? Who would be able to teach others like Jesus did? What if people rejected them as teachers? What if they didn't know where to go next? Who would lead them? Would it be one of them? Did any of them really have what it takes to be such a leader?

In times of change there is a certain amount of anxiety. We can't see the real future – even if we can envision one. One commentator suggests that Jesus is the *true non-anxious presence*: the one who has the power to calm everyone down. You may have known someone like that. The one who can walk into a room escalating in emotion and disagreement and worry and fighting, and defuse it with a few words. The one with authority and wisdom that everyone looks up to. The leader.

As he prepares the disciples for the changes to come, Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” These are certainly words of consolation, but it's not always easy to control what the heart does. Even though it is natural to associate change with loss -- (and we don't want to lose anything good as we know it – thus, the anxiety!) – we continue to be prepared for it through the Holy Spirit and through these words of Jesus right here today.

We can be assured that with Jesus' peace in our hearts we can be confident that we can continue to keep and focus on His word no matter what changes we face. And part of keeping that word is giving it away. Because that is one way that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will indeed be revealed to the world at last.

Amen.

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