

Trust the Future to God
5th Sunday of Easter | May 10, 2020
John 14:1-14 | St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Franklin, TN
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Let me start by giving you a little more information on what's going on while Jesus is saying the words in today's Gospel reading.

Jesus and his disciples are together for what will be the Last Supper. Jesus has washed their feet. He has commanded his disciples to love one another. He has predicted that Judas will betray him and Peter will deny him. And he's starting to speak about the future, about what is about to happen to him and to the disciples, in mysterious words:

Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me...[but] where I am going you cannot come...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. (John 13:33, 14:2-4)

I personally find a lot of the Gospel of John to be way more confusing than even the parables in the other Gospels. So I'm so thankful that Thomas speaks up and says: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" I bet Thomas is saying out loud what a lot of the other disciples were thinking.

Their disciples are pretty sure danger is coming. Jesus is talking as if he's going to be gone from them, but they're not quite sure what he's talking about. They are looking ahead to an unknown future.

That is something we all know about. We are all always wondering about our futures. I mean, probably some of us more than others – some people are better at living in the moment, less prone to worry, or maybe just more practiced at living with uncertainty – but we all know what it's like to wonder what the future will hold.

We wonder about what we are going to do with our lives: if we'll go to college, and where; what kind of career we might have; who we'll marry; whether we'll have kids, and what they'll be like. We dream about promotions; we wonder about moving; we worry about our family's health and our own health. We get anxious over big decisions and how they will impact the rest of our lives.

And in these days, we probably wonder and worry even more than usual. When will our daily lives go back to normal? When will we feel safe being around other people? How is our work life going to pan out? What will school look like in August? How can we even plan for the future with so many unknowns?

There are so many times we wish we had just a little more information about what the future holds, so that we could make the best choices, so that we could rest a little easier.

A lot of similar anxieties and needs for comfort are wrapped up in Thomas's statement: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus responds to Thomas's question and his worries about the future. And Jesus's response is all about trusting God. He doesn't tell the disciples exactly what's going to happen. He doesn't give them a clearer picture of their future or where he is going. Instead, he reminds them that even in the face of the unknown, they still know enough to be able to live into the future with confidence, hope, and peace.

Thomas asks, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

"I am the way," Jesus says. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life...If you know me, you will know my Father also."

It's like Jesus is saying, Yes, the future is a mystery to you – but remember that your future is in God; your future is with God. And since you know me, you know about who God is. You know about what God is like. You know you can trust God. You know the way into the future with God.

And if you're a bit confused or dissatisfied at this point in the story, you are not alone. Because at this point another disciple, Philip, speaks up and begs: "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Now, Jesus gets on Philip's case a little bit when Philip asks that question – and I get why. But I also get why Philip felt the need to ask for more information, more certainty about God. We can't see God; we can't touch God; we can't send God an e-mail and get an answer back. It's frustrating sometimes, especially when we really, really, really want some certainty to hold on to. If we could at least get a clearer picture of God, maybe it would help. "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

It seems like it comes most naturally to us – to humans in general – to think of all the ways that God is distant from us. We sing of God "immortal, invisible;" we pray to "Our Father in heaven;" we think of God as above our little lives, beyond suffering, beyond emotion, transcendent and omnipotent, the "unmoved mover," and all sorts of big fancy words like that. Or, at least, a lot of people have thought of God that way and do think about God that way.

And when we're asking about and worrying about our futures, and the answer we get is "trust in God," if the God we're thinking of is invisible and distant, well, that answer might not bring us much comfort.

But Jesus gives us a different answer; Jesus points us in a different direction. Philip begs, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus responds: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." He says: God is not only distant and invisible – God is also close by, and has been seen on earth in Jesus. Jesus is the way to God, because in Jesus we see God. He is the truth about God, about who God is.

But what does that mean? What does Jesus show us about who God is?

Let me start offering answer to that question by sharing a picture with you.

There's a Lutheran church building in Annaberg-Buchholz, Germany, called St. Anne's Church. It was built in 1499 (and for all you history buffs out there: yes, 1499 is before there was such a thing as Lutherans; it started out as a Roman Catholic church). In that church building is this incredibly ornate door, surrounded by carvings of angels and saints. It's called the "Beautiful Door."

The main carving is of Jesus on the cross. Right behind the cross is an image of God the Father. One visitor to St. Anne's Church described the carving like this:

It looks like God the Father is embracing the suffering Jesus with his whole body...You can see the Father only by looking at Jesus, and you see the fullness of God embracing...the fullness of suffering humanity [as God embraces Christ]. God has already done this in the incarnation, but here we see it in its extreme. God the Son experiences suffering and and death as God the Father wraps his arms around the whole thing, saying, “Nothing could be more unlike me than this, yet this belongs to me.”¹



Everything we know about Jesus – his birth, his teachings and ministry, his death on the cross, his resurrection – everything we know about Jesus also gives us information about God. Through Jesus, we know God.

So when we wonder and worry about what our future holds, and we know the best answer is we can hear is “Trust God” --- then here are some things we can remember:

¹ Kyle Rader, “A playground bully, her victim, and their God,” *The Christian Century*, 8 Nov. 2019.
<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/first-person/playground-bully-her-victim-and-their-god> Accessed 10 May 2020.

In Jesus Christ, we see that God is a God who:

- Cares for the everyday needs of people, from hunger to grief to sickness
- Reminds us not to worry (Matt. 6)
- Forgives us when we do wrong (even when that wrong is denying God)
- Challenges the powers-that-be if they're not treating God's children right
- Loves us so much that God would come to earth, take on human form, and even die
- Overpowers the works of evil in this world and uses them to bless us
- Is powerful enough to defeat death

And when we know we are trusting our futures to THAT God – that can give us so much comfort.

If you're having trouble finding some rest for your worries about the future these days, try this prayer exercise:

Sit quietly, and let yourself feel those worries. Then, pay attention to how your body is reacting to those worries. Where do you feel a physical sensation when you worry? Maybe shortness of breath, or a busy feeling in your head, or tense neck muscles. Wherever you feel the worry, place your hands there. Imagine the worry moving out of that place and into your hands. Then hold out your hands like you're holding your worries. Imagine the God we know through Jesus Christ sitting next to you, looking at you with understanding and compassion. Maybe repeat a favorite comforting Bible verse or remember a favorite hymn. Sit in God's comforting presence for a moment, and then hand your worries over to God. Trust your future to our loving God.

Let us pray.

*You Who Birth the Future: In your promises, I am instructed to fear not the shadows of the future, but to listen for your voice through the valleys of darkness. Show me the path to life and the way to fullness of joy. Remind me in prayer that your Word casts no shadows for it is the light of the world, which includes me. Amen.*²

² Peter Traben Haas, *Centering Prayers: A One-Year Daily Companion for Going Deeper into the Love of God*, quoted in the Centering Prayer app by Comtemplative Outreach.