

John 14:1-14

Jesus said, "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?" 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. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "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. 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."

I would like to start with a prayer this morning. "Heavenly Father, I would like a brand-new BMW M760i with leather upholstery, built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, a Sunroof, and...well... whatever other options you would like to throw in at your discretion. IN JESUS NAME! Amen." David, would you go out and check the parking lot for me? Oh darn, I forgot to designate color. I hope its's not pink.

What? Maybe you forgot what we just heard. Let me go back to our Gospel passage for this morning. Jesus said, "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it." I hope it is graphite!

Ok, enough of the silliness. But did you see what I did this morning? I cherry picked. I don't mean that I picked the most expensive BMW made. I mean that I selected a single verse that suited my wants and desires and interpreted it in a way that suited me. I took it out of its context and jettisoned the rest of the surrounding information because the context got in the way. When we approach Scripture that way we always miss the point.

So, what does the whole message say?

It starts by telling us that we shouldn't be so worried. God has things handled. He has things handled, so trust him. Believe in him and believe in his Son. Believe that God has it

worked out even to the point where he has an amazing home, some translations say mansions, all set up for you, and for us, to come to.

And now that you know *that*, the message continues. Jesus tells us from that first piece of the message that we should know the way, because God has it handled.

Thomas, not having a particularly shy personality, speaks up and tells Jesus that, actually, they don't get it. "Lord, we don't know this place to which you are going. How can we know the way?"

So, Jesus clarifies. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, no one comes to this place I speak of, no one comes to the life that I promise, unless they come through the way, the truth, and the life that I am providing."

Now, that all sounds well and good, right? But where does my BMW come in? I mean, setting aside that context that I just outlined, I should have a BMW in the parking lot. I asked for it. I ended the request with, "In Jesus' name." So, what the problem? Where's the confusion?

Well, the confusion and the problem lies in the in how we understand the words, "In Jesus' Name." We tend to treat those words like we would "abracadabra". They become our magic words to get what we want. We have been trained to think this way since our childhood. This is Mother's Day. How many mothers, how many parents here, when one of their children asked for something, said, "Say the magic word."? And they would automatically say, "Pleeeaaase." And would get their request fulfilled. And when they didn't, when they didn't get what they wanted, they would look all confused and look up at us and clarify the situation, "But, I said pleeeaaase!"

But that is not what Jesus would have meant when he told them that they can have what they ask for "in his name". It was not meant to be a passphrase. When they said something in someone's name, what they meant by that was that it was said or requested within the essence of that person. It fit within their authority and their goals. It was stated or asked for so that whatever came next would be meant to align within their vision for all things. It was all of that, or it wasn't truly done, or asked, in the person's name. God wants us, as best as we are able, to embrace the fullness of life in the big picture; life within his big picture. He wants us to align with his plan for the salvation of all people. He wants all of us to have the totality of what his name, his essence, his plan, brings.

There is a story about how this lesson was learned by a sculptor in the mid-1500s. The artist had just finished an amazing, marble sculpture of a beautiful angel. He was proud of his accomplishment but wanted to be sure that it was perfect in every detail, so he invited his teacher and mentor, Michelangelo, to come and inspect his work, which he did. The young artists watched in silence as the Master painstakingly inspected every aspect. Once he was completed, he turned to his student and said, "It lacks just one thing." And then he left.

The student agonized over the comment for the next few days, scouring the work for the imperfection. Finding none, he finally broke down and went to Michelangelo at his studio and pleaded with him to tell him what was one thing that was lacking. Michelangelo said, "Your work is perfect in every detail. It is magnificent. It only lacks one thing...life itself."

Now that sounds like the ultimate compliment, and I think it probably was meant to be. But the young artist realized at that moment that, without life, the best that he, on his own, would be able to do is to turn an ugly mass of stone into a beautiful mass of stone. Life was the essential ingredient that *his* creations could never have.

Within the fullness of the context of Jesus' promise to give us all that we ask in his name, we are being told that even those most perfect prayers asked outside of the way, the truth, and the life that Jesus offers, become, at most, a beautiful mass stone, a beautiful collection of human wants and desires, without the fullness of life God offers. They are simply human approximations of the joy that God has already set up for us, in which to find the fullness of life, both in the here and now, and for eternity.

But there is another part of the message that we heard this morning. We were assured that God has things handled and that he has prepared a life for us. We are told that there is a way to that life, and that way is Jesus. And when we embrace that life and align with God through his Son, we are promised that we will have everything that we ask for, everything we could desire, within *that* life and within *that* reality.

But there was one more promise made. The promise was that when we align with the way, the truth, and the life, we will do even greater things than those things that Jesus did. That astounds me. How could that be even possible? But more than that, that truth might be discouraging, especially to those of us who have most of our lifetime behind us. Where are the "great things?" I have never invented a wonderful new machine, or developed a new medical procedure, or discovered a new species. I have not introduced a new product, or built a great corporation, or founded a university, nor even grown a great mega-church with tens of thousands of members.

But the thing that we have to remember is that the greater things that Jesus promises us are also tied to "In His Name." And those "greater things" are there for all of us to accomplish, because those "greater things" are everyday things in the Kingdom of Heaven. Food given to those who are hungry. Shelter provided for those who are homeless. Truth given to those who are lost. Love given to those who feel hopeless. Jesus given to those who have not met him. All these things are of ultimate greatness when offered within God's plan for us.

In Jesus' Name!

Amen