

Spring Lake Presbyterian Church
Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway
April 20, 2008

John 14:1-14

14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In 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? ³And 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.

⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” ⁹Jesus 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’? ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹Believe 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.

Where Does God Live?

Ask a child to draw a picture of where God lives and they will draw clouds with a great big sun shining through. If I asked my Mom to draw a picture of where God lives, she would most likely draw a great big red heart. If you asked your neighbor where God lives, you’d hear an answer something like “heaven.” But where is this place? Where is the place that God lives and moves and has the fullness of existence?

The Gospel of John speaks in a language that recognizes God not dwelling in some far off heavenly place that we can not grasp, but rather dwelling with us, among us, touching us. John’s Gospel is where we discover the intimate relationship of humanity with the divine. Jesus begins, in verses 1-3, telling us of the intimacy between God and humanity, but before we get there, we need to identify the relationship between God and Jesus.

Christianity teaches a complex teaching called the Trinity. We use the Trinitarian formula when baptizing someone into Christianity. As I pour water upon a head, I pronounce, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit!” Because of scripture passages like John 14, the early church developed the beliefs that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all one. We use the Trinitarian formula to remind each other that the Christian faith is a faith in God. We could just as easily say, I baptize you in the name of God (!) but we separate out the personalities of God to help us keep God out of the clouds, to recognize that God is both awesome AND personal. Faith in God through Jesus Christ is a reminder that our faith is tangible and intimate as well as sacred and holy.

So Jesus says, *Believe in God, believe also in me.* Why can’t we just believe in God and be done with it? In the privacy of my office, several of you have asked that very question. Why must we believe also in Jesus? If Jesus is God, why can’t we just keep things simple and believe in God and God alone? Let’s read further. ²*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? ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.”* The key in this

verse is “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.” Jesus stresses intimacy. Where I am, there you will be.

It seems we are wondering then again where God lives, but now we are also wondering where Jesus is going. And somehow, the way Jesus is speaking, it sounds as if Jesus is going away to be with God, but it’s confusing and muddled, not to mention it sounds like a long way away if there are a bunch of dwelling places in one big house. So Thomas speaks up, he says, simply, “I don’t get it.” “If you don’t tell us where you are going, how will we know how to find you?”

I’m so thankful for Thomas. He speaks what we’re all wondering as we listen to Jesus. And Jesus takes the time to respond to him – albeit Jesus is a bit frustrated that Thomas, who has spent a lot of time with him, still doesn’t get it. Nonetheless Jesus takes the time to respond. *I AM the way, the truth and the life! No one comes to the Father but through me.* And, if we take this literally, then we wonder if Jesus is trying to take the place of God. And evidently, we aren’t the only ones wondering if Jesus has some secret access to God that no one else has, as if he’s put himself up on a pedestal. So Jesus continues, ⁷*If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.*”

Philip also doesn’t get it and again asks for some clarity. ⁸*“Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”* And Jesus tries again! *“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.* By now the disciples and we who are readers have about decided Jesus has lost his marbles, comparing himself to God. But if you look closely, that’s not what he’s doing.

Let’s look really closely. *The Father who dwells in me does his works.* Jesus is saying all of these things because he has allowed his life to be so full of God that everything Jesus says or does or thinks is of God, not himself. So here’s the kicker. If we believe that God also lives in us, we also know the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If we believe that God lives in us, we too can “get it.” What made Jesus so special was that he realized that God lived in him and through him and transformed him. No one else in all of our religious history has allowed God to infiltrate them so deeply that the human can not be distinguished from God. This was pure intimacy. What made Jesus so special was that he did the works of God and he spoke the words of God – not just a few things here and there to gain some brownie points, but literally his whole self was emptied so that God could enter. Intimacy. Jesus and God were so close that there was no telling where one ended and the other began. This piece of scripture boldly proclaims that we too can know such intimacy with God. Jesus tells Phillip and Thomas to look at him in order to see the Father, but if Thomas and Phillip would open themselves to be filled with God so that all that they do and say and feel and live is the breath of God, then they too would experience the same intimacy with God. They too would know in the inner fiber of their being the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The scripture attests to this saying, ¹²*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.* ¹³*I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* ¹⁴*If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.* Jesus tells Thomas and Phillip and those of us who receive this message long after their day that if we will take in all of God, if we will open our very beings to receiving God so that our thoughts are not our own but God’s, then we too will be able to live and act as Jesus did. We will be able to do greater works than Jesus did. We will be able to change OUR world – not just the world between B.C. and A.D. but our world in 2008 – with the power of God.

As we read the Gospel of John, we discover that God and Jesus were so intimate that God filled Jesus up. He too took on I AM the way, the truth and the life. I AM was the name God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. It is the name that reminded Moses that he could not be limited to time or space or place or culture. Moses had desperately wanted to gain some power over God by asking for a name, but the name that was given

was simply “I AM,” was simply existence. When Jesus speaks those same words, he is acknowledging that he is a part of “I AM”, that he is a part of existence that can not be contained. Does this separate Jesus out as another God? No, it simply shows us the potential that we can grasp if we also open ourselves up to I AM. “I AM” is simply existence – the breath of the Holy – with and in and through. We know the way, the truth and the life when we stop trying to locate I AM and realize the Creator the Sustainer, the Breath of Life simply IS. The answer to the question of today’s sermon title: Where does God live? . . . Simply it is “yes.”

Prayer: Holy One who IS the Way, the Truth, and the Life, fill us through our whole beings; may we desire I AM in our most secret places; and as we open ourselves to you to fill and consume, may your will be done. Amen.