

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 10, 2020

Pastor Zach Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California

Gospel: John 14:1-14

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹ “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

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?

³ 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.

⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

⁶ Jesus said to him, “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.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

⁹ 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’?

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; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

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.”

Do you remember the time you really started to believe in Jesus? I’m talking about that moment where believing in Jesus became truly felt in your heart. That moment where believing in Jesus became more than just an idea and practice; it became a living precious thing.

Now, I truly believe that the Holy Spirit has been with me since the day I was born. I was fortunate enough to be raised in the Lutheran church my entire life since both of my parents were Lutheran pastors. It is clear that God was nurturing my faith and instilling a love for Jesus in me since I was an infant.



However, it wasn't until high school that believing in Jesus became a living and breathing thing for me. Up until then, I did believe in Jesus, I knew that Jesus loved me, but it was just something I accepted as truth. To use an incomplete analogy, it's like the difference between knowing math and being passionate about math.

But all of that changed when I was in high school. In my freshmen year of high school, after I had discovered a love for singing, I joined the Salem Lutheran Church choir. Joining the choir began what would become a very active faith life for me. Soon, I was actively involved with the youth group; I was helping to lead the singing with our praise band worship; and, I was also helping out with designing the Salem Lutheran Church website (this was back when the internet was still relatively new to most people).

What I remember most about my time at Salem Lutheran was how the people surrounded me with love, grace, encouragement, and support. This was also the first time I was able to have a pastor who wasn't one of my parents since there was another pastor on staff in addition to my mother. The love that the congregation showed me helped me, for the very first time, become passionate in my heart about God's love for me. This passion is what drove me to become involved at the church, and it also laid the foundation for what would become the building blocks of eventually hearing God's call to the ministry. Because the people showed me God's love through their support, care, and encouragement, I became passionate about serving God and spreading God's love to others.

So why do I bring this up? Well, in the gospel story today, Jesus tells the disciples that believing in him will not only help them through the troubling times to come (remember, this is before Jesus' death), but it will also show them the way, the truth, and the life. In addition, it will also help them to continue the proclamation of the good news in the world, for what they do in the name of Jesus will give glory and testimony to God's love and the promise of resurrection.

As I studied this text over the past week, I started to realize just how powerful God's love truly is, and how it frees us to become passionate in our believing in Jesus. Jesus is right in telling Phillip and the other disciples that to believe in Jesus, to know his revelation through his words, is to know the Father. In other words, to know the words and deeds of Jesus is to know the nature of God.

If you look back in the Gospel of John, what Jesus shows us through his actions and reveals to us through his words is exactly what the first chapter promised—grace upon grace. To turn gallons upon gallons of water into the best wine, to speak a word and cause a lame man to walk again, to heal the eyes of a man born blind, and to even raise Lazarus from death, are all signs that point us to the nature of God, which is love and life. Of course, this becomes all the more clearer to us through Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection, which shows us the ultimate sign of love and grace by letting us know that God won't even let death take us away from God.



Jesus shows us that the way to the Father, the truth of what it means to be in relationship with the Father, and the life we are given through that relationship, is to be freed by God's love. Thankfully, God's love has already been given to us as a free gift. There is nothing we need to do to earn that love. Like I said earlier, my want to start serving God and neighbor in love came as a response to the love of God I felt through the congregation members who cared for me and nurtured me.

The truth is that we, because of his death and resurrection, are free to become passionate about believing in Jesus, so that he can show us the way forward. We are free to become passionate because we can see through Jesus' words and actions that we are embraced by God's love and God will never let go of us. If you are unsure of this, just think about those motherly figures in your life, and I'm not just talking about our biological mothers. Today is Mother's Day, and while this holiday certainly celebrates our mothers, it is also a holiday that celebrates anyone in our lives who have shown us motherly love. For me, a mother is anyone who loves unceasingly, works at all costs to protect their cherished ones, forgives often, teaches about life with all its joys and struggles, and walks with their cherished ones in a way that helps them to flourish. Know anyone in your life who has done this for you? Motherly figures can be a parent, grandparent, relative, friend, teacher, mentor, coworker, child, pastor, therapist, counselor, and many others. A motherly figure doesn't even have to be just female; I know many men who are motherly figures.

But, even if you don't think there is a motherly figure in your life, God has still given us the gift of a faith community. We, like those cherished members of Salem Lutheran Church, are free to speak the words of Jesus and show works of love to each other to remind each other that the gift of God's love embraces all of us. Because we know the words and deeds of Jesus, because we are in abiding relationship with Jesus through baptism, which ties us into the death and resurrection, we have been given the gift of God's love and we are free to become passionate about it. We are free to show each other God's love, so that we feel empowered to go out and spread that love to others outside the walls of our church.

In doing so, we will know the way, the truth, and the life, and that is especially good in these uncertain times. With the state of California slowly beginning to reopen, with not knowing what things are going to look like moving forward, we can follow Jesus as the way, and he will guide us to that which will be life-giving for us and for all people. After all, being grounded in his love will free us to act in love.

Amen.

