

Introductory

This is the reading for Easter 5A in LW. It does not appear in the TLH one-year lectionary. It is a favorite text to be read, and often to be preached on, at funerals. I have preached on it more than any for them. For the next three weeks, we will hit the rewind, and go back in time to the evening before Jesus would be crucified; Maundy Thursday.

Specifically, for the next two weeks we will be in the fourteenth chapter of St. John's gospel, with the focus this week on heaven and on Jesus declaring Himself to be as "the road, the truth, and the life." Next Sunday He will speak of the coming of the Holy Spirit. We will remain in John for Easter 7 (High Priestly Prayer), and then on to Pentecost.

These texts for the next three Sundays serve as a sort of transition from the Easter Season to Pentecost Sunday and the Pentecost Season, and they speak of the connection between the Resurrection of Jesus and His Church. In the text for today Jesus comforts His disciples with talk about eternal life in heaven and the road used to get to that destination.

Next week He will comfort them with talk about the eternal life that comes by means of the Holy Spirit; Word and Sacrament in the Church. He will then comfort them with the assurance that though the world is going to be against the Church, the Father is very much for the Church, and will in the end give us the victory over the Unholy Trinity.

The immediate context of today's reading is that Jesus has finished washing the feet of the disciples. Then He celebrated Passover, which becomes the Sacrament of the Altar. Judas, whose public confession at this point was that he was a Christian, received the Sacrament and then left, "and it was dark." Then He tells them that He is about to leave.

The dog always seems to know when something's up. He always knows when it's time to go to the vet, which he doesn't like. One day, he somehow knew that we were leaving for an all-day trip, and that he wasn't coming with so he ran away. But he reconsidered. Deciding that a day alone in the house was better than a day alone outside, he came back.

In a similar way, the disciples of Jesus, who are human, know that something is up. They understand that Jesus is going away, but this exchange reveals a level of uncertainty, some confusion, and maybe just a little bit of anger about just what these last three years have been about, like the recent seminary graduate who is newly cast into the parish.

Specifically, they don't seem to know to where Jesus is going (v. 36), and they have a hard time understanding even after Jesus makes several attempts to explain it to them,

and when Jesus tells them that they can't go with, that they were about to be separated from Jesus, they were very troubled. They had been together 24/7 for three years.

People who live on the same college campus for four years can get pretty tight. Often students will form a small group that may be kept intact for many years after graduation. I got pretty tight with my seminary class, and still keep track of them and in close contact with several. We were a group of a little over one hundred and we had a lot in common;

We took the same classes, same teachers, with the same goal. We all wanted to be pastors. The single guys stood up at each other's weddings, and the married became godparents to each other's children. A similar tightness of group often comes about in military or law enforcement settings, especially if you have some shared experiences.

In all of these situations, and others like them, a leader or leaders will often emerge. Not to beat a dead horse, but the confrontations between Jesus and their religious leaders that week must have been stressful, and it had just been confirmed to them that one of them, Judas, would betray Jesus, and He said that Peter would deny Him not once three times.

Textual Notes

1. The disciples are upset, and Jesus tells them to stop being upset, “Μὴ ταρασσέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδιά – stop your hearts being troubled.” To review, when a sentence begins with “Μὴ,” a negator, followed by a verb in the Present Imperative mode, it is a command to stop doing what you're already doing; they were currently troubled in heart.

The verb “troubled” occurs eighteen times in the NT, and it indicates a strong emotion, like the churning of the gut. When was the last time your gut churned? Invite your hearer to recall that time for him. The “your” is plural, and the “heart” is singular. Like many idiomatic phrases, the troubled heart comes down to us currently in the vernacular.

The imperative to stop being troubled is in the middle voice; the command is to stop allowing outward circumstances to cause you inward consternation, and He is about to tell them how to do that. This is a phenomenon familiar to Christians; We are constantly being troubled by things happening in the world, especially if you watch the news.

Bible Hub says that “heart” means “the *affective* center of our being.” The language pictures these several men as having a singular collective heart. Cambridge Bible have an interesting take on the idea of their troubled heart. Are they troubled by what has just happened, or is He preemptively exhorting them because of what He is about to say,

There had been much to cause anxiety and alarm; the denouncing of the traitor, the declaration of Christ's approaching departure, the prediction of S. Peter's denial. The last as being nearest might seem to be specially indicated; but what follows shews that 'let not your heart be troubled' refers primarily to 'whither I go, ye cannot come.'

According to me, in the first paragraph of this verse, they are already troubled.

Have you ever been told “don’t worry, it’s going to be okay” and you know it isn’t? That sentence is tentatively slotted to be the opening line of this Sunday’s sermon. The last sentence would then be that when Jesus says “it’s going to be okay” it is. In the first case, there are many things in life that are never going to be okay and are cause for sorry.

In the second case – how do you not be troubled? I talk all the time about how none of us are going to get out of this alive, and the worst possible case scenario for Christians is we die and go to heaven. When Jesus tells us to stop being troubled, He gives us a reason why, using two verbs; first an indicative verb, then the same verb in the imperative.

The reason not to be troubled, is because He is God, “πιστεύετε εἰς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ εἰς ἐμὲ πιστεύετε – you believe in God, believe also in Me.” The best way to stop being extremely agitated and confused is to believe in Jesus. It may be a good idea at some point to explain to the hearer a couple of things about the cognates πίστις and πίστέω.

The first word “πίστις” is a noun, and the second word “πίστέω” is the cognate verb. Those words and their cognate forms have the same etymological origin and mean the same thing. Our use of *different* words for that one word in the translations and speaking may make understanding hard and even cause confusion in the mind of the hearer.

The second thing is that a command is a command, and when a command comes from God, it’s the Law. Here we are commanded to stop being troubled. With our words and tone we proclaim the Law; that our being troubled is sinful and comes from a lack of belief, which is a sin. We should completely stop doing the one and do more of the other.

With our words and tone we then proclaim the Gospel; that God has taken our unbelieving hearts and made them into believing hearts, and that we have nothing to be troubled about, here in time and hereafter in eternity. We will be especially untroubled in eternity where we will be dwelling in the house of the Father, and we get our own room.

To believe in God in that time and place was nothing profound. Atheism is a new thing. The Natural Man believes in the divine, and we are hard pressed historically to find societies who did not have gods, religion, and the like. Dr. Robert Bucholz, Loyola, Chicago, opines that there were no atheists in all of Europe when the Reformation began.

People like David Hume and Thomas Paine were Atheists, but secretly. Darwin’s wife was a Christian, and he tried hard, but found himself utterly unable to believe in God. He kept his book under wraps for several years just the same. These days, you can’t swing a dead cat without hitting an Atheist, and they will even proudly shout it from the rooftops.

2. He uses the metaphor of the house with many rooms, “ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου μοναὶ πολλάι εἰσιν – In my Father’s House are many rooms.” He uses the word “οἰκία,”

the typical word used for a house. He does *not* use the word *πράιτωρίον*, or the word *αύλή*, or the word *βάσιλείον*, words that would indicate some sort of mansion or a palace.

He's talking about a house, and He's saying that there are many “μοναί,” a word that occurs in the NT meaning here and in 23, and it means “rooms.” It's a nice, big house, not to be confused with a one-room shack. The preacher can make a lot of hay with that metaphor; not everybody gets in, but you do, and there's great food and the like there.

Then He rhetorically asks, “εἰ δὲ μή, εἶπον ἂν ὑμῖν· ὅτι πορεύομαι ἐτοιμάσαι τόπον ὑμῖν – if it were not so, would I have said to you that ‘I journey to prepare a place for you’?” He will shortly be leaving them – Crucifixion – and then He will be coming back – Resurrection – and then leaving again – Ascension – then the preparation of the rooms.

In His telling them this, He adds the particle “ἂν,” which occurs about 300 times in the NT. The word is used here by Jesus to emphasize to the hearer that the words that He speaks are true. It's a constant theme in John – who was there – that He has to almost continually assert His authority and therefore asserting the truthfulness of what He says.

3. Speaking to their uncertainty, He moves to the subjunctive mood, “καὶ ἐὰν πορευθῶ καὶ ἐτοιμάσω τόπον ὑμῖν – and if I should journey and (if I) should prepare a place for you,” then this is what will happen: *πάλιν ἔρχομαι καὶ παραλήμψομαι ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἑμαυτόν, ἵνα ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἦτε* – I come again and will take you with Me.”

He continues with a purpose clause, explaining why all the motion, “ἵνα ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἦτε – so that where I am, you also should be.” The purpose for His going, and then coming, and then going again, and then preparing rooms in the house is that they might all be united in their heavenly home, a place where it's all good all of the time.

4. He now tells them that “καὶ ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω οἴδατε τὴν ὁδόν – to the place where I am going, you have known the road.” The first verb “I am going” is in the present tense. The second verb “you have known” is in the perfect tense; in the past they have known, and they continue to know “the road” to the destination of Jesus, and they will follow.

How do we get there? You already know. These days, I translate the word “ὁδόν” as “road.” Without even mentioning Dynamic Equivalence, we talk all the time about a “road,” but seldom about a “way.” In KJV times, “way” was a common word for what we would call a “road,” and you can still see all kinds of roads called “way” in England.

It's a word you would use to refer to a road trip, and you don't call it a “way trip.” John first uses it (1:23) to talk about how John the Baptizer came – quoting from Isaiah – came to make straight “the road” for the Christ. Dr. Weinrich's commentary is out – Volumes 1 and 2 of 3 – and I suppose he talks at great length about “the way” in it. I may buy it.

5. Thomas speaks up, pointing out that “ὃκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ὑπάγεις· πῶς οἶδαμεν τὴν ὁδόν – we don't know where you go, how we know the way?” Some manuscripts omit “οἶδαμεν

– know” and replace it with “δυνάμεθα – able.” Probably the first reading is preferred, but either way, the meaning is clear; he thinks they are not able to know the way there.

Thomas is saying that if we don’t know our destination – and he says they don’t – then how can they know which road you should take to get to it? If you know where you’re going, then you can ask google maps, and she will tell you which road to take to get there. But if you just open her up and do not give her a destination, good luck with that.

Analytical Thomas seems to be the detail guy as well as the one who asks the question that everybody is thinking, but all are afraid to ask. Since Jesus has made it clear that He is going to His “Father’s house,” that He’s going there to prepare a place for them, and they will follow, Thomas’ question must be about the exact location of that house?

If you tell me that you’re going to your father’s house, I can find my way to you there if I know where that house is located. But if I don’t have a street address, there are a lot of houses belonging to a lot of fathers out there. We know Jesus is talking about heaven, and probably so did Thomas. His question is either rhetorical or he’s just making sure.

6. Speaking of how to find that house, and turning a nice double entendre, Jesus says that, “ἐγώ εἰμι – I am” three things; “ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ – the road, the truth, and the life.” If you are looking for the road to that house, He Himself is the road to that house, and then He uses the verb of being to say that He is also “the truth” and “the life.”

That He goes with the verb of being, which is also that personal name of God, and then speaks of “the road, the truth, and the life” as He does is an indication of how closely those three things are tied to one another, and to Him. If you know Jesus as the road, then you also know the truth. Having truth, and knowing the true way, you also have life.

Pop American Spirituality, whether or not it attaches the name “Christian” to it, holds that there are a lot of different “ways” or “roads” to heaven. You have no doubt heard people say that, and some even seem to think that Bible-believing Christians are the only ones on the way that does *not* lead to heaven. We are not. In fact, just the opposite.

These spiritual practical pagans might even use the metaphor about how a lot of airplanes are coming from a lot of places, along a lot of different routes, but they all end up in (insert the name of a city). The counter-metaphor told by Christian apologists is that you may *think* you’re on a plane headed for (insert the name of a nice city), but you’re not.

In fact, you are going to be surprised when the plane lands and you find out that your actual destination is (insert the name of a city that is not nice), which is not nearly as good of a metaphor, as far as metaphors go. Anyway, nowhere in the Bible does Jesus make it clearer that heaven is an exclusive club; the Christians are let in, the rest are not.

Pilate famously asked Jesus “what is truth?” After spending his entire existence seeking the answer to that question, Modern Man is repelled by the very idea that there is such a

thing as truth. Except for Christians, nobody thinks the Bible contains absolute truth about God, or about anything else, for that matter. The Bible teaches of Jesus, the Truth.

There is a word in the Greek language for physical life. That's not the word here. The word here is the one used to refer to the entire life of the person; body, soul, and (for the Christian) spirit. Jesus and His religion are made for man. The Christian life may and often does contain hardship, but the Christian has the correct understanding about things.

Christianity answers the Big Questions in life; how did we get here, where are we going, and what should we be doing while we're waiting. God created us, Christians are going to heaven and the rest – sucks for you. While we wait for our final journey to our forever home, we make the world a better place and try to get other people on the right road.

7. He continues in an accusatory tone, “εἰ ἐγνώκειτέ με, καὶ τὸν Πατέρα μου ἂν ᾗδαιτε· ἀπ’ ἅρτι γινώσκετε αὐτὸν καὶ ἑώρακατε – if you had known me, you also would have known the Father. From now you know Him, and you have seen Him.” Another popular theme in John; you see or hear the Son, it's like you have seen or heard the Father.

Ellicott points out a key to understanding these words of Jesus,

The thought here is made quite plain by what has preceded; but the form in which it is expressed demands attention. The emphasis of the first part of the sentence is not upon “Me” as is generally supposed, but upon “known.” In the second part the emphatic words are “My Father.” The English word “known” represents two Greek words in the better text which are not identical in meaning. The former means, to know by observation, the latter to know by reflection... “If ye had recognised Me, ye would have known My Father also.” If ye had recognised who I really am; ye would have known that I and My Father are one.

8. Phillip weighs in, presuming now to speak for them all, and tells Jesus to “δεῖξον ἡμῖν τὸν Πατέρα, καὶ ἄρκει ἡμῖν – show us the Father, and it's enough for us.” The first word is an imperative of a verb that means “to clearly exhibit or to show clearly” or “to give the evidence or proof of a thing” (biblehub.) For exactly what is Phillip asking here?

Again, we quote Ellicott,

He catches at the word “seen” and thinks of some revelation of the glory of God as that vouchsafed to Moses, or it may be of a vision like that which three of their number had seen, and of which others had heard, in the Mount of Transfiguration. One such vision of the Father, he thinks, would remove all their doubts; and would satisfy the deepest longings of their hearts.

9. We detect disappointment in Jesus' response to Phillip's request – or was it a demand? – λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Τοσοῦτον χρόνον μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωκάς με, Φίλιππε –

Jesus says to him, ‘so long a time I am with you, and (you) don’t know me, Phillip?’ – They have been together for three years, so how could Phillip possibly not know Him.

It’s a rhetorical question, the answer to which is obvious, “ὁ ἑώρακώς ἐμὲ ἑώρακεν τὸν Πατέρα· πῶς σὺ λέγεις Δεῖξον ἡμῖν τὸν Πατέρα – he having seen me has seen the Father, how you saying, ‘show us the Father’? The “see” verbs are both in the Perfect Tense – they have seen past, and that seeing continues into present and even into the future.

It’s not the first time He has said something like that.

10. Continuing to speak only to Phillip, “οὐ πιστεύεις ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ Πατρὶ καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐστίν – don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” The question beginning with “οὐ” expects an affirmative answer. Phillip knows it to be true. Jesus continues proclaiming – again – that the words He speaks are the Father’s words.

He speaks finally of “ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων ποιεῖ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ - dwelling in me, He does His works.” John is very fond of this verb (to dwell) and its noun cognate. Somebody is always dwelling somewhere or in somebody, you could almost preach an entire sermon or two on that one word. But I won’t. This here sounds a lot like when God dwells in us.

11. Those very profound and hard to fully comprehend trinitarian words are followed by more words like them. In fact, He seems to have come full circle back to words very similar to the words He spoke to begin this sermon, “πιστεύετε μοι ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ Πατρὶ καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοί – believe me, that I am in the Father and the Father (is) in Me.”

And if you’re not going to do that, then “εἰ δὲ μή, διὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ πιστεύετε – if not, then because of the works themselves, believe.” That last word is not the word for “miracles” or “signs.” It simply means that He wants them to believe this ontological truth; the mystery of the Trinity. The Triune God was there long before His works were.

The works of Jesus are the things He has done during His life. Surely one who has been with Jesus 24/7 for three years knew that He isn’t like the others. He lived a perfect life, is about to die a sacrificial death, to be raised and ascended – they were all seeing this all play out before their eyes. And “τὰ ἔργα – the works” may well include miracles as well.

12. In fact, speaking of “works,” of Christians Jesus says, “τὰ ἔργα ἃ ἐγὼ ποιῶ κακείνος ποιήσει, καὶ μείζονα τούτων ποιήσει, – the works I do, he will do, and greater than these he will do.” And just what are these “greater works,” that they will do, “ὅτι ἐγὼ πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα πορεύομαι – because I go to the Father.” The meaning is that after Jesus leaves for good at the Ascension, the Christians will do more and better works than He has done.

Jesus was on the earth for only three years, and the time and geographical scope of His ministry was limited to a small, otherwise obscure corner of the globe for those three years. Fast forward two millennia. The Christian religion not only has more people than any other religion, it can be found all over the world, among every people, and online.

If we look only at what comes immediately after this, there were Twelve Apostles plus Seventy plus a multitude of others who over much time and space occupied the Apostolic Office, and the Gospel spread. Besides that, the Church has made the world a better place with Acts of Mercy, charitable giving, morality, and a host of (see Al Schmidt).

Speaking of this text and having warned us not to get too full of ourselves, Augustine points out that in the Acts of the Apostles the man was healed by only the shadow of Peter passing over him. In another place, he talks about faith as that greater work of which Jesus speaks, and all those good things coming from the Church are rooted in faith.

Theodore of Heraclea likewise cites the shadow incident, but finds greater meaning in their power, “for service to those who believe and the punishment of the extremely wicked,” which I would take to mean the Office of the Keys (ACC - John). Indeed, the Church acts as the gatekeeper of morality within herself, and it seeps into society at large.

We are salt.

13. The power for the Church to do good in the world and to make the world a better place comes from the same place as it does for the Son, from the Father, “καὶ ὃ τι ἂν αἰτήσητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου, τοῦτο ποιήσω – and whatever you should ask in My Name, this I will do.” He gives us the template for appropriate petitions in His Lord’s Prayer.

We should pray for things “ἵνα δοξασθῇ ὁ Πατήρ ἐν τῷ Υἱῷ - so that the Father is glorified through the Son,” by followers of that same Son. Looking at those petitions, and other models for prayer in the Bible, the “anything” does not include things like winning the lottery, and God may or may not like sports, but He has no dog in that fight.

14. Jesus concludes this section by assuring these men that though He will be leaving, yet they will be able to contact Him, “ἐάν τι αἰτήσητέ με ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐγὼ ποιήσω – whatever you should ask Me, in My name, I will do,” most certainly a reference to things spiritual – especially Word and Sacrament – and just as certainly not a to things material.

Law/Gospel

Shacks/Houses – This earth and these earthly bodies are like shotgun shacks in the middle of a swamp. The heavenly bodies that we will be given on the last day (1 Cor 15) will be much better, and they will be located in heaven.

Troubled/Peace – Once again, we find Christians who are troubled and in turmoil, and once again we find Jesus speaking to them words of peace and assurance.

The Wrong Way/The Right Way – There are a lot of religions, a lot of alleged ways to get to heaven, out there, and they are all headed to an eternity that will not be good. Jesus comes and shows us the correct way, the way that leads to heaven, an eternity that will be good. I don’t know why me, but I rejoice that He has shown me that way.

False/True – See above.

Death/Life – This is always a good Easter theme.

Sermon Titles

The Road, the Truth, and the Life

A Heavenly House

Can We Come With?

Hymns

Awake, My Heart, with Gladness – LSB 467

Christ the Life of All the Living – LSB 420

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing – LSB 633

Sing Easter Hymns during the Easter Season.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Matthew)*.
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

GBS – Jeffrey Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary, Matthew*, CPH, 2006

GND – Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, Eerdmans, 1982

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

SCR – David Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, CPH, 2004

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html