

Finding God Along The Way

John 14:1-14

May 22, 2011

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These opening words from John are like eating grandma's fresh apple pie on a summer afternoon. They're pure spiritual comfort food. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. My Father's house has plenty of room for you." There's nothing better than being assured that God has made room in his household just for you and that it is ready and waiting.

When I was in college my mom and stepdad were married. My stepdad has three sons. All of a sudden my family went from two kids to five. Things could get pretty tight around the house. When they first married, they lived in the house I grew up in. The bedroom that was mine as a kid was now the spare bedroom. Three of the five of us were living on our own, so on weekends when we all came home the rule was first one home got the spare bedroom. After a while we made it a game. We'd call home to see when the others were planning on getting there so we could strategize how we could get home before the others to take control of the bedroom. Ok, so maybe I took this game a little more seriously than others since it had been my room.

It seemed to be the fairest way for us all to feel as though the house belonged to everyone. After a year or so, my mom and step-dad decided to move. As they were looking for houses, they made sure it was a place that we could all call home (a place where we wouldn't have to fight for a room to sleep in on weekends). So over a weekend, all of us came home and went house hunting together. After looking at several houses where some of us liked some things and hated others, we all finally found a house where there would be a place waiting for each of us. What my parents realized is that as a new family they needed to make plenty of room for all of us to have a place to come home to.

But so many people don't have this assurance. So many people wander on the way of life alone. I heard a man talk about his work with people who are chronically homeless in Raleigh, NC. The chronically homeless are about 10% of homeless or so who for all kinds of reasons are homeless for long periods of time without any real hope of finding long term housing. The thing that surprised me most about what he said was this... "It's true that these people are drug addicts, or don't want housing or that they are lazy; but the common link for all of them is that they lacked healthy relationships. They have no one to rely on." These folks have no assurance that someone will prepare a place especially for them. Until they learn who they can trust they won't find their way.

The disciples were faced with a similar problem in today's gospel reading. They were trying to figure out how to find their way after Jesus started talking about his departure. Jesus had given them fair warning that he wasn't going to be around forever. The problem was that the disciples were hearing what Jesus was saying but they didn't seem to grasp it. They didn't really believe they would be ok without him. But, Jesus was not abandoning them. He was preparing them for the next steps of discipleship.

The only problem was that they weren't buying it. Jesus assured them that they knew the place where he was going. But Thomas and Philip got right to the point with Jesus. Thomas was like, "Ah...Lord, we *don't* know the way! How do you expect us to know?" Philip didn't have any questions, just one bold request, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied!" You've got to love their honesty and their straight talk.

Thomas and Philip had forgotten what Jesus said at the beginning of all of this talk, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust God, trust me." The disciples lost sight of all that Jesus *did* to show them who God is.

And isn't this what happens to us sometimes? In spite of everything we have seen God do in our lives, we lose sight of Jesus in times that we need him most. We lose the sense that what God has done in Jesus has any power in our lives. We forget that Jesus really is the way, the truth and the life for us. And it often happens when our faith is tested or when life throws us a curveball.

Your young adult child makes a decision that comes with negative consequences and you can't do anything about it. You aren't able to do a favorite hobby anymore because of aging and arthritis. A job comes to an abrupt end when there is no longer a market for your skills. You watch the way things change so quickly in the world and you don't know how to keep up with all the changes or if it's even worth it.

It's times like these when we wonder if we really do have a place to come home to. This is when we go looking for God, searching for a way to make sense of our lives again. Just when we go looking for a way, looking for some truth and looking for a life worth living, God comes to find us. God comes looking because God wants us to follow God's way. God wants us to trust God's truth. God wants us to live the life that is offered through Jesus. This isn't simply a matter of knowing the right information about Jesus or praying the right prayer or even belonging to a church. It is a matter of trusting that Jesus really is who he says and living as though our lives depend on it.

Our lives depend on Jesus who healed the blind man and raised Lazarus from the dead. They depend on Jesus who showed compassion and gave a fresh start to the woman at the well. Our lives depend on Jesus who brought light to Nicodemus' dim understanding of God's love for the whole world and convinced him that there was room enough in God's house for him.

Katie Nelson is a student at Mayo High School and one of Zumbro's Peer Ministers. One day she found another student sitting in the corner of a restroom looking sad and lonely. Katie sat down next to her and tried to ask her some questions, "Are you okay? Do you want to talk? Can I help you?" The girl wouldn't answer Katie. When she walked into the bathroom the next day, she discovered the girl again in the same bathroom at the same time. Katie realized this was the girl's pattern. So, everyday Katie made sure to go into that restroom and sit down next to this girl. It wasn't until several months later that Katie learned who the girl was and some of her story. Eventually this girl found a friend, someone to listen, in Katie. Do you think it's possible that God went looking for that lonely young woman through Katie Nelson? I do.

These are the great works that Jesus promises God will do through those who trust him. God will use us to make sure that everyone knows that no matter what their circumstances, no matter what they've done in the past or how screwed up their life is in the present, God's household is big enough for everyone and Jesus has prepared a place for each of them. Eugene Peterson puts it this way, "When we do the Jesus truth in the Jesus way we get the Jesus life." (repeat)

I don't know exactly what Katie said to her new friend each day in the bathroom at Mayo High School. I'm sure she didn't spout Bible verses at her right away, she didn't come blazing with answers, maybe she didn't even mention God, but she didn't have to for this young lady to experience God doing something new in her life. And Katie probably didn't think of it at the time, but she was doing the Jesus truth, in the Jesus way, and experiencing the Jesus life.

Friends, do not let your hearts be troubled. No matter what your circumstances today, Jesus has prepared the way for you, he has spoken and acted truth for you, and he always offers you abundant life. Trust him, follow him. And don't be surprised when you discover that God is using you to show others the Jesus way of life. Amen.