

The Way to God the Father

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Date: 20 March 2022

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

I'm Kat Bragg. I'm part of the Oakland Women's Little Faith Community Group. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel according to John, chapter 14, verses 1 through 15, and 19 through 24, as printed in your liturgy.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

[1 : 12] Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said, Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us. Jesus answered, don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority.

Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing his good work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

[2 : 15] Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will even do greater things than these, because I am going to the Father, and I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. If you love me, keep my commands. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me, because I live.

You will also live. On that day, you will realize that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. Then Judas, not Judas Iscariot, said, But Lord, why do you tend to show yourself to us and not to the world?

Jesus replied, Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

[3 : 28] These words you hear are not my own. They belong to the Father who sent me. This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ.

Good morning, Christ Church. We had a dinner last night with our session of elders and our staff team, and we had a very lively, competitive game of Bible Jeopardy.

And based on some highly questionable last-minute rule changes, Andrew's team won and beat my team. So if you feel any tension or sense any resentment from me today, that's probably why.

If there's a little edge to the sermon. How many of us would agree that our world has changed, our lives have changed significantly over these last two years?

Even since February, just as the plague was starting to lift, bombs began to fall in Europe. And, you know, we look at those pictures that are being produced every day in the newspaper, and we kind of can't complain so much about our lives right now.

[4 : 38] Even though \$6 a gallon, are you kidding me? Inflation, it's, the world feels unstable. It feels unpredictable. And our lives feel more insecure, more fragile, more transient than I think they felt in the past.

And probably many of us would tell our own story these days, and it's kind of a pre-pandemic, pandemic, post-pandemic narrative. When we look at our families, our friendships, our work, our school, our finances, our church, it's pre-pandemic, pandemic, post-pandemic.

And honestly, we're, like any other church, sort of rebuilding. We're in a rebuilding process right now. We have some people who have not been here physically in person in two years.

And if that's you today, welcome. We're so glad that you're here. Some of us are brand new to Christ Church today. We know no one here. And if that's you, we're so glad that you're here.

Some of us have been coming here for, like, the past year, and we're looking around going, who are all these people? I don't know any of these people. And so I kind of look at these dynamics as a pastor, and I'm thinking to myself, okay, what are the building blocks of a healthy church?

[5 : 53] And the church for the past two millennia has found sturdy materials, sturdy building blocks in the Gospel of John, particularly chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17, where we're going to be camping out for a little bit.

And it's the night before Jesus died, and he gave this long, intensive training session, really kind of a graduate-level course on what it means to be a disciple.

This is the longest section of teaching we have from Jesus, actually. It's in the upper room. He's washed his disciples' feet. He's given them the Lord's Supper. He's told them through these acts something about the cleansing of his cross, something about the nourishment of his self-sacrifice.

And then he launches into this farewell discourse, this electrifying teaching for these 11 highly disoriented disciples.

Now, in 1 Corinthians 14, 3, the apostle tells us that the one who prophesies, the one who preaches or teaches, speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort.

[7 : 06] And that's what Jesus is doing in this teaching. He's speaking to his disciples for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort, giving them this strong reassurance because dark clouds have been gathering for weeks as Jesus is approaching his death.

In fact, if you go back to John chapter 12, it says that meanwhile, in verse 9, meanwhile, a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there, and they came not only because of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well. For on account of him, many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him. That's John 12.

John 13, in this upper room, the disciples are receiving shock after shock after shock. Jesus himself, it says, is troubled in spirit as Judas dramatically leaves the table to betray his master.

And after that happens, Jesus announces to them the unimaginable, his coming crucifixion. And then after that, Peter says, well, Lord, I'm never going to leave you.

[8 : 16] You know, I'm going to be with you to the end. And Jesus says, well, Peter, before the cock crows three times, you're going to deny me, disown me three times.

The context of John 14 is a context of heart trouble. These disciples are experiencing heart trouble. And that's why Jesus says in verse 1, do not let your hearts be troubled.

Trust in God. Trust also in me. Why are they troubled? Because Jesus says, I'm leaving. Tonight, I'm going to be handed over. Tomorrow, I'm going to be killed. Shortly after that, I'm going to be resurrected.

But then very soon afterwards, I'm going to go away so that the Holy Spirit can come to you. Jesus says at the end of this discourse in John 16, 33, he says, I've told you all these things so that in me you may have peace.

For in this world you will have trouble. But take heart, for I have overcome the world. Jesus is strengthening, encouraging, and comforting their hearts so that they'll not be troubled by all the trouble.

[9 : 27] He's wanting to give them confidence so that the trouble will not overthrow you. I want to give you courage so that you can face the troubles, the terrible troubles that I'm about to send you into.

And with these words, Jesus cures a heart trouble that no cardiologist can cure. Jesus knows he's about to send these apostles out to live deeply troubled lives as ambassadors of a king who's crucified.

And you just can't serve a troubled king without experiencing some trouble yourself. Amen? And so Jesus says, I want to enable you to experience that trouble with an untroubled heart.

Who wants an untroubled heart? So let's get into John 14. Jesus says here, he says, I want to show you the Father's place, the Father's presence, and the Father's power.

That's where I want to start with you all. I want to show you the Father's place, the Father's presence, and the Father's power. First of all, he shows us the Father's place in verse 2.

[10 : 38] My Father's house has plenty of room. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you? Now, anybody watch HGTV?

My kids love the home and garden television network, particularly the shows Fixer Upper and Hometown. And the essence of these shows is that they turn these old, dilapidated, but potential rich houses into beautifully renovated homes and, you know, in the process revitalize and renew whole neighborhoods and towns.

And the key to these shows is this powerful universal longing that all of us have for home. For home. A place where everything fits, where everything suits you, and it's all affordable.

Right? Right? So, none of these shows are filmed in California. They're all filmed in Texas and Mississippi and whatnot. But I think most of us know that a home is not just a nice house.

A home is a place where you're accepted. It's a place where you belong, where you're experiencing well-being and peace. And so, in that sense, even the best home in this world doesn't really satisfy that deep desire that all of us have to be home.

[11 : 54] Some of you have gone out to serve with our Loaves and Fishes ministry. And that's inspired by another ministry in Austin, Texas. And they say this. They say the single largest cause of homelessness is a profound, catastrophic loss of family.

And why is that loss of a home, why is that loss of a family so deeply wounding and deeply devastating to a human being? I mean, kids particularly.

If kids grow up without a good sense of home, without a memory of a safe and loving place, then they'll develop an inability to attach, an inability to ever really be at rest and to settle down in their lives.

And so, Jesus in this moment, talking about his father's house, he's tapping into a deep need, body and soul, that all of us have for home and for family.

Because he knows. He knows that he's going to send these apostles out and they're never going home again. All of them but one are going to die horrible deaths.

[12 : 58] Jesus is sending them into terrible trouble. And so, he tells them first off, my father's house has plenty of room. My father's house has many, many rooms.

Jesus begins this sermon on discipleship focusing on the end, focusing on our future hope. Now, when I was a teenager, my dad forced me to write down answers to these three questions.

The questions were, who am I, where am I going, and how am I going to get there? And my dad forced me to write down these questions. And some of you were like, okay, this explains a lot about Jonathan.

We should probably pray for his therapist and I would appreciate that. And it was tough, you know, it's tough to find answers to these questions. When you're 16, who really knows, like, who am I, where am I going, and how am I going to get there?

But my dad was on to something. And I think Jesus is on to something because if you do not, you just don't know how to live unless you know where you're going.

[14 : 03] You can't know your purpose unless you know your place. And Jesus wants us to know that the Father's house is a place of love.

Verse 3. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. The Father's house is not just where the Father is, it's where Jesus is.

It's where the Holy Spirit is, and Jesus is saying that your true home is with the triune God who's united in this infinitely dear, incomprehensible, mutual love.

Each person pouring joy and delight into the others, and you are welcome. You are invited to enter into this embrace of God. Jesus says, if you're my disciple, you already have this place that you've been longing for your whole life long.

You already, it's reserved. It's guaranteed for you. One of the reasons I think teenagers and people in their 20s and 30s are more depressed and anxious than they've ever been is because they don't know who and whose they are.

[15 : 21] They don't know where they're going and how they're going to get there. And in our secular age, we tell people, we tell young people, there's no God. You're lucky mud.

You're living between the Big Bang and the cosmic collapse. And then we kind of look around at society. We're like, why is there so much nihilism? Why is there so much despair? And I wonder what would happen if we taught kids the old truths, the old answers to the questions.

What is my chief end? Why am I here? What's my reason for being? Well, your chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Well, what's my only comfort in life and in death?

Well, my only comfort is that I'm not my own. I don't belong to myself. I belong body and soul and life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. There's some old truths that we need to teach young people today.

It's a terrible thing to deprive human beings of their eternal significance. And in our secular age, we tell kids, you're not going anywhere.

[16 : 32] You're going to live. You're going to die. You're going to become food for worms. Very quickly, you're going to be forgotten that you were ever even here. And what you need to do right now is just live your life as a buffered self within this imminent frame, completely cut off from the eternal and infinite being of God.

No wonder people are so desperate to get all that they can out of this life because this life is all that they're being given. But Jesus has another way.

Jesus says, if you're my disciple, when you die, the worst thing that can happen to you on earth is actually the best thing. I mean, it's horrible for all the people you leave behind.

But for you, the darkest thing is the most brilliant thing. Because when you die, you're not going to leave the light and go out into the darkness. When you die, you're going to leave the darkness and go out into the light where there's life and there's love.

And in that place, you're going to be more alive than you've ever been because you are in this indestructible union and this unbreakable bond of love with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[17 : 50] And if you're in that inner circle, man, you don't need to waste your life trying to find some inner circle. You're in. You're in the most important inner circle that exists in the universe.

And you have absolute, inviolable, irrevocable security in that place. My Father's house has many rooms, Jesus says.

And how can we be sure that that's our home? Well, Jesus makes some promises to us. He says, I'm going there to prepare a place for you. I'm coming back to fetch you.

And I'm going to take you to myself so that you can be with me. And when Jesus says that, he says, I'm the forerunner who's gone ahead of you to get the Father's home ready so that you're going to arrive in a place that's prepared for you where people are expecting you.

And I'm not only the forerunner, I'm the escort who's going to come back at your time of death and I'm going to lead you to the Father's house. You're not going to get lost along the way.

[18 : 55] You're not going to make that journey alone. I'm your escort. And Jesus says, I'm not only your forerunner, I'm not only your escort, but I'm your destination. And I'm going to take you there where I am in my Father's home so that you and I can be there together forever.

And for these young men, these apostles in this upper room who are experiencing deep heart trouble, maybe like you're experiencing deep heart trouble, they need to know where they are going so that they can know how to live their lives accordingly.

My dad was right. You know, begin with the end in mind. And these words become the remedy. These words enable them to transcend their troubles and live extraordinary lives of sacrifice as Jesus ambassadors.

And they can enable us to live extraordinary lives of sacrifice today. You guys with me? Jesus shows us the Father's place.

But Jesus also not only shows us the Father's place, he shows us the Father's presence. I'm extremely grateful for these disciples who are humble enough, bold enough to ask their questions.

[20 : 20] Thomas, Philip, and Judas, son of James, ask what all the other disciples and ask what we ourselves are dying to ask. In fact, if you read through this whole discourse, they kind of get deeper in.

And at some point, they're asking questions, and they just turn and look to each other and admit, like, we don't understand anything Jesus is saying right now. Anybody ever feel that way when you read the Gospels and the epistles?

If that's you, you're not alone. These disciples are like, we got questions. And this one pupil at the back of the class, he puts up his hand, and Thomas, he's just heard all these promises, verses 1 to 4, about the Father's place.

He's just gotten this strong reassurance of our future destiny in Christ that you are going to share in Jesus' victory with the Father forever. And Thomas asks this question that shifts us from the future to the present.

It shifts us from the Father's house in the far future to the Father's presence here and now, the Father's presence with you when you get up to go to work on a Monday morning.

[21 : 29] And Thomas' question prompts this core statement of the Gospel in verse 5. Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way?

And Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Jesus says, the only way to know God the Father is through me. I've come to make known to you the truth of the Father and the life of the Father.

And the way to the Father is through the truth and the life of the Father that I bring to you. So if you wish to see God in heaven, look to Jesus on earth.

That's what he's saying. If you wish to see the immortal, invisible God, do not look within yourself. Heaven forbid. Look at Jesus of the Gospels.

[22 : 30] Look at Jesus in the New Testament. And some of us hear this statement, I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. And we're like, nope. That's completely arrogant and egocentric.

Jesus, that sounds kind of narrow and exclusive. And I get that. We wrestle with this question of inclusion and exclusion.

And one of the people that I think's gotten at this in the 20th century is C.S. Lewis. And I didn't give you a Lewis quote last sermon, and I apologize for that.

So I bring another one this week. This is from The Chronicles of Narnia, The Silver Chair, which is one of my favorite books. And in this story, there's a stream and there's a girl.

And between the stream and this very thirsty girl is a lion. Are you not thirsty? Said the lion. I'm dying of thirst, said Jill.

[23 : 28] Then drink, said the lion. May I, could I, would you mind going away while I do? Said Jill. The lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl.

And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious, rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

Will you promise not to do anything to me if I come, said Jill? I make no promise, said the lion. Jill was so thirsty now that without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

And she said, do you eat little girls? I have swallowed up girls and boys, men and women, kings and emperors, cities and realms, said the lion.

It didn't say this as if it were boasting or if it were angry or if it were sorry. It just said it. I daren't come and drink, said Jill. Then you will die of thirst, said the lion.

[24 : 30] Oh, dear, said Jill, coming another step nearer. I suppose I must go and look for another stream then. There is no other stream, said the lion.

Lewis is saying that, you know, if you want to quench your thirst, you've got to come to the stream of God the Father. And the only way to get to that stream is through Aslan. It's through the lion.

It's through Jesus. Right? And this is prompting questions for the disciples. Philip is wanting to speak up at this point in verse 8. He says, Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.

And Jesus answered, don't you know me, Philip, even after I've been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Don't you believe that I'm in the Father and the Father's in me?

The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.

[25 : 31] Or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Jesus is saying here that when you hear my words, you hear the words of God.

And when you study my works, you're considering the works of God. All that I say and all that I do, those are the Father's words and works.

And you can know God only by listening to the words and attending to the works of Jesus. And when you hear me and you see me, you're hearing and seeing God. So Jesus is saying, follow me.

Come and walk in my way. Come and trust my truth. Come and live my life. And as you do, you'll get to know the way and the truth and the life of my Father. For when you see Jesus' face rendered in the Gospels and in the epistles of the New Testament, you're seeing the face of God.

Right? And this is why Christians have a steady daily IV drip of the New Testament in our veins. This is why we fix our eyes on Jesus. And it's why particularly we focus our attention on his cross because that is the fullest and deepest revelation of who God is.

[26 : 46] Right? Adam and Eve turned away from God. And their just judgment was homelessness. It was to be cast out of their home. And Jesus says, well, I'm going to the cross to take the place of your homelessness so that you can get home.

So that you can have a future home in my Father's house and so that you even now can have a home in my Father's presence. The reason he did that.

The reason Jesus bore our guilt and our judgment in his own innocent person. The reason Jesus took away our sin and rose in triumph over death was to get you back to the Father's presence.

And this is what he means in verse 19. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. On the day of resurrection, you will see me.

And because I live, you also will live. And on that day, on Easter day, you will realize that I am in the Father and you are in me and I am in you.

[27 : 51] Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has opened the way back to the Father. And there's no question of having the truth of the Father and the life of the Father apart from the way of the Father.

Namely, his crucified and risen Son. Does this make any sense? Jesus wants to show us the Father's place and he wants to show us the Father's presence, which is in Jesus himself.

And finally, Jesus wants to show us the Father's power. And I'll end with this. Verse 12. Very truly, I tell you, all who have faith in me will do the works I've been doing, and they will do even greater things than these because I'm going to the Father.

What? Really? Really? Really? Jesus, you must be mistaken. Can any of us, no matter how prayerful or how faithful, can any of us do greater things than Jesus did?

Anybody want to claim that one? Just raise your hand on that one. Can any of us reconcile the world to God? God, satisfy divine justice, reveal God, exercise the devil, carry away the sins of the whole world, rise defeating death forever?

[29 : 15] Please forgive me, but I can't believe that anyone, no matter how great, can do anything even remotely touching the greatness of what Jesus did.

Not to mention doing greater things than he did. So what in the world is Jesus talking about? What is he saying about the Father's power in and through us, his disciples?

Well, I think Jesus is speaking quantitatively, not qualitatively. Jesus, as we know, he didn't get very far beyond Israel. After three years of ministry, he had 11 disciples in this upper room.

Great ministry success story. He had 120 disciples at this pre-Pentecost prayer meeting. He's worked in a very small nook over a very short time with a very few people.

But at Peter's Pentecost sermon alone, he would win 3,000 people. And the apostolic church had this much wider field and longer time with more people.

[30 : 16] In fact, they would reach the Mediterranean world geographically in just one generation. They would reach the Roman Empire convertingly in about 300 years.

And in fact, this in one sense, the evangelist John, who gave us this gospel, has done quote unquote more than the historical Jesus by bringing him to every language and culture in the world.

We're here in Berkeley talking about John's gospel. So how did the apostles do this? How were they able to do greater things? We're told that they prayed in Jesus' name for the Father's power.

That's the secret sauce. They prayed in Jesus' name for the Father's power. Verse 13. Now notice that it's not we who do greater things than Jesus, but it's the resurrected, ascended, and glorified Jesus who does greater things than he himself did in his pre-resurrection life.

The risen Jesus does more than the historical Jesus in his lifetime by releasing the Father's supernatural power in and through his praying disciples, his praying church.

[31 : 41] And this does not mean adding in the name of Jesus to anything we might think of, however stupid or selfish or hurtful. Amen? We read about the church in the news being just, I don't know, not really doing stuff in Jesus' name.

Because a name is all about somebody's character. Jesus says, if you're getting to know me, if you're getting to know my word, if you're getting to know my teaching, if you're getting to know my purposes, then you're going to know how to pray in my name.

Right? He says, if you obey my teaching, then the Father's going to come and be at home with you, and I'm going to be at home with you, and the Holy Spirit's going to be at home with you. And if you're praying at home with me in obedience to my teaching, and in my cause, and for the sake of my kingdom, and as a representative doing my work, and so that the Father may be glorified in the Son, then you can ask.

And you should ask whatever. Whatever. You should ask for anything. And you should know that when you say your whatevers and your anythings, know that I want to do those things way more than you want to do those things.

And so Jesus says, come on, disciples. Ask me. Try me. Like, do it. Expect way more from me.

[33 : 07] Like, Jesus is saying, I want you to come and ask me frequently, intensely, and boldly for whatever and for anything in my name.

Now, I'm out of time, but we've had this little boiler room prayer group happening at 930 on Sunday mornings. The boiler room, you go out, and you can feel our heater.

It's like, really, is anybody hot today that's really working well? The heater is housed just down below the sanctuary, and we've been gathering there at 930 to pray these whatevers and these anythings.

And it's kind of a quiet, hidden revolution in Christchurch right now. Because people I've been known for years, I've been their pastor, I'm kind of getting to know them for the first time.

Because I'm seeing their heart before God, right? As the Spirit is coming among us and enabling us in Jesus' name to ask for these whatevers for the Father's glory.

[34 : 10] And we're asking God to move. We're asking God to do stuff. We're asking God to meet needs. We're asking God for his kingdom to come in this place. And so if you don't have a place to do that with other disciples, I want to invite you 930 on Sunday mornings to join us in the boiler room.

But beyond that, I just want to leave you with this question. What's one thing that Jesus would want you to ask in his name this Easter, over the next four weeks, that would bring glory to his Father?

Sit with that. What's one thing Jesus wants you to ask him in his name for the glory of his Father, for his Father's power to be at work in your life?

Now, don't ask for something small and like that's probably going to happen. Like, I hope, I pray the sun will come up tomorrow morning. Ask for something big. Ask for something that will only happen if God does it.

Right? And as that comes to mind, I just want to invite you to just write down what that one thing is. You can do that right now. Write down what that one thing is.

[35 : 40] That Jesus is counting on you to ask in his name for the glory of his Father this Easter. And as you're writing that thing down, I don't see many of you taking me up on this offer.

But as you're writing that down, just go ahead and pray it right now. Just go ahead and ask right now. In Jesus' name, I'm asking, Father, that you would glorify yourself in this particular way in my life.

I want to see your power. I want to see, I want to experience more of your presence. I want to know more of the hope that I have in your place.

Lord, I want to see a church that's living in that reality. I want to see a city that's experiencing the very power of God. You think we can pray this way?

Ask things in Jesus' name. Ask whatever. Ask anything. I hope that we will. And I pray it now. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, would you bring glory to yourself among us?

[36 : 59] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.