

10th May 2020

Today's Reading:

John 14:1-14 the way to the Father

- from Revd. David Hildred



Last week we heard Jesus make the outrageous claim that “I am the gate” and that anyone who tries to get in the sheepfold by any other way than through the gate is a thief and robber. And now this week he turns me into a superhero.

v12 “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these...”

So Jesus fed 5,000: I'm going to feed 6,000. Jesus walked on water: I'm going to run and dance on water. Jesus healed the people with leprosy: I'm going to heal everyone who has cancer.

Is there anything that makes you think I might have got hold of the wrong meaning of this passage? For sure there are from time to time testimonies of great miracles that God has done in our days, but for the most part those glimpses of future paradise are rare. Can you see how when we read a passage like this it is far too easy to make it all about us - what great heroic figures we will be?

This passage takes place when Jesus spends his final evening together with his disciples, before the day of crucifixion. Let's see if we can work out where the emphasis is for Jesus. His disciples were afraid because he'd been talking about being betrayed and leaving them and they wouldn't be able to follow him. Let's see what Jesus talks about to calm their fears.

v1 trust in God, trust also in me

v2 In my Father's house are many rooms

v6 I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.

v7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father

v9 anyone who has seen me has seen the Father

v10 don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?

v10 it is the Father living in me

v11 believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me

v12 he will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father

v13 and I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.

OK, do we get it? Jesus isn't concerned about us becoming superheroes, but he is concerned about our relationship with the Father, and he wants us to be confident in how that impacts our life here and now.

The disciples were anxious about Jesus leaving them; it felt like the last three years of their lives spent following him had all been for nothing. But Jesus explains how this is exactly what the last three years have been about: he has to 'go away' - or as we know it, go through death and resurrection - in order to secure for them a place in the Father's house. There is no other way we can get close to God, no other religion can guarantee it, no amount of effort on our part will enable it.

It's another outrageous claim of Jesus, isn't it? (v6): "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me". Some people will be offended by that statement of Jesus: "Really? No other way? Are you saying I'm not good enough to get there?"

Whereas, with a realistic spiritual evaluation of ourselves - that we are nowhere near perfect for God's paradise - we are meant to find immense comfort and hope in that statement that Jesus will ensure we reach the room that is prepared for us. He's doing all the work, and he's coming back to fetch us - which we should most easily understand as him referring to his second and final return.

It's really great that the gospels are such honest records of how his disciples got on with Jesus. They don't get everything that Jesus says first time - or maybe even second and third time. They stumble along in their faith, and Jesus leads them on and points them in the right direction. Here, Philip is beginning to get the drift about how it's all about a relationship with the Father, but he doesn't quite get the full picture: "Show us the Father and that will be enough for us".

It gives Jesus the chance to clarify. See me and you see the Father. What I say is what he says. What I do is what he does.

And what's more, Jesus suddenly throws back the curtains to show an amazing view of what lies in front of the disciples from this time on. Since Jesus is on his way back to the Father, their job from here on in is to join him in glorifying the Father. Jesus will be working from home, in that anything we ask for that is in line with his purposes - that is, anything we ask for 'in his name' - he will make sure we get it so that 'the Son can bring glory to the Father'. That's his great focus, and it becomes our great focus too. That's what we're here for.

Coronavirus has made a lot of people think about what life is really all about. Do we really need so many airlines to fly all around the world so often? Do we really need to make so many journeys by car? Why do some people earn hundreds of thousands of pounds when the jobs that we really need to be done are so often poorly paid? And many more big questions like that.

Today's passage reassures us that we don't need to be afraid. We can be confident in the reality of the Father's house. We can be confident in the certainty of the return of Jesus to collect all believers and enter that house. We can be confident that in Jesus we have everything we need to reach the Father's house. We may be daunted by the realisation that our focus here and now is to be on glorifying the Father with the help of Jesus - but don't forget what's coming up: Jesus is about to tell his disciples about the amazing resource they will have with them for this task - the Holy Spirit is on his way! He will help us to speak like Jesus, act like Jesus, react like Jesus, take on the attitude of Jesus.

So, shall we be offended by this week's outrageous claim of Jesus to be 'the Way', or shall we be encouraged, and settled, and focused, and be found living in him and for him?