

Acts 7:55-60
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14

John 14:1-14

14 Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.
²In 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? ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.' ⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If 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.'
⁹Jesus 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"? ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹Believe 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. ¹²Very 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. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'

I had a professor in seminary who told a story about being lost when he was a boy, which is the sort of thing that happens when you leave your nine year old son in the care of an uncle who lives in less than standard housing in the desert of southern California with no immediate plans for bettering himself or his lot in life or contributing to

the advancement of society. My professor told me that his parents dropped him off at his uncle's place for a week or so every summer when he was growing up because they thought it would increase his qualities of self-reliance. I don't know if it did or not. About all I ever saw of the professor was sitting around the break room telling stories about his uncle.

On the particular occasion Frank was telling me about, an attempt to heat fish sticks in their original container had gone wrong and he and his uncle decided to take a hike while the trailer aired out. There were a lot of ravines in the area and they walked down them because walking downhill is always easier, but it does not afford much opportunity to see around you and keep your bearings. Pretty soon, one ravine wall was looking very much like another. Frank recalled that his uncle was becoming visibly nervous, which was uncharacteristic and Frank got scared. It was too hot and there was no water, and they were genuinely lost for a long time. Shadows were getting long and Frank was crying.

He heard his uncle give a yelp and he looked and saw him dancing and clapping his hands in front of a sign at the mouth of one of the ravines and the sign said "La Salida". Frank said he didn't know what that meant then, but he's never forgotten it since. "La Salida" is Spanish for "the way out".

Frank said the reason he had always remembered the story was not because of how scared he had been or how relieved he was to get out of the maze of ravines – but the gratitude he felt later, when he had time to think about it. The gratitude he felt toward whoever had gotten free himself, but then had taken the time to go back into the ravines with a sign to show others what they desperately needed to know.

In this morning's Gospel lesson Thomas and Philip say things that make me think they were lucky they didn't wind up as a bunch of bleached bones in the ravines around

the Sea of Galilee. Thomas heard Jesus promise that he was going to prepare a place with his father and Thomas wondered how they could possibly know where that was. Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father because, after three years with Jesus, he didn't think he could know who God was.

Jesus said to Philip, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." When Thomas asked the way, Jesus said, "I am the way."

When we live our lives as disciples, sometimes we are so addled by the threats around us (like a youngster who is lost) or we are so relieved about the disasters that we have avoided (like the same youngster that has gotten home) that we forget the foundation of our relationship with God. He has come to us as Jesus Christ and told us the way.

ADDRESSING THE CONFIRMANDS

You are about to affirm your baptisms. The sign is already in place. It was marked on your foreheads sometime ago when you were baptized. But signs are not helpful if they are not followed. So we call this service Affirmation of Baptism, you will declare your intention to follow that sign that has already been put in place for you.

Never forget the sign is in front of you. It is tangible, as real as all these people who surround you this morning who love you. They are here to encourage you and celebrate with you. You can't name everybody here – but we are all going to pray for you. This body of believers is only a sign of the whole community of God that you are about to say you want to be a part of.

It is not always easy to follow the sign that marks our way. The apostles Thomas and Philip didn't always understand about following the way and they get churches named after them. They asked Jesus for a sign, but signs aren't always as spectacular

as we would like for them to be. Jesus does not respond by make the sign bigger and brighter. He responds by calling his disciples to recognize a sign when they see one. (Maybe the sign is in a strange language; it might require a deeper understanding.) But Jesus is clearly calling his disciples with high expectations.

You are surrounded today by people who love you. You are called with the ancient words of Jesus Christ himself.

This congregation represents the whole people of God. We, the whole people of God, will continue to surround you for the rest of your lives.

The first words of Jesus in this morning's Gospel lesson are "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Jesus speaks those words to you. That doesn't mean you can relax. When, a little farther on in our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus says, "I am the way." that is not the same as saying, "Take it easy."

Jesus has high expectations for these lives that he loves so much. Your lives. As a matter of fact, in verse twelve of this morning's lesson, Jesus has some troubling news for you. "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."

Jesus says you are going to do greater works than he did. I believe you can. In many ways you have resources and abilities to tell so many people about "the way". You have the love and encouragement of so many people. And you have the gifts and talents to put up so many signs of your own – helpful signs that people need.

Your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ is before you; it is before us all. There will be times when you will be lost and scared, but, even though some might tell you that you need to keep Jesus close by in case you get into trouble, being lost and scared is not the basis for your relationship with God. And, there will be times when you avoid

disaster. Actually those times happen far more frequently than any of us ever know. But, even though we thank God for helping us out whenever we dodge a catastrophe, relief is also not the basis for your relationship with God.

The basis for our relationship with God is that he came into this world and our lives as Jesus Christ to give us the sign of his love and show us the way.