

Sunday, May 10 2020

I Peter 2:1-10 and John 14:1-14

“The Way, the Truth and the Life”

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! We rejoice on this fifth Sunday of Easter because we are Christians and we need to praise God because of Jesus Christ who was dead and is alive forevermore! Last week I spoke about the beauty and warmth of the sunshine yet it was only two days ago that we saw snow flurries gently falling from the sky. Yes this is spring in Canada—don't take your toque or snow tires off too soon- in case of snow!

So how are you doing? How many times have you been asked this question this past week? How am I doing? Well I'm doing fine but I do miss seeing people from my family and church family; talking on the phone is good but we need each other to lift us up, to encourage us and give us strength and energy. I notice this as I share these services with you—in worshiping with you in the sanctuary you share your energy and passion with others and I pick up on this and give it back to you. Here all I see is my bookshelf except in my mind's eyes—I know that some of you have dressed up for church like you would regularly, others are in your robe and pjs.. yes I have real clothes under this robe! And still others are in a combination- dressed but not Sunday dressed! Maybe we should be asking what are you doing while being at home? We know many people are cleaning out closets, baking, studying, learning new skills, playing games and learning school lessons electronically. But how are you reflecting your part in the family of God? What are you doing? And most importantly, what are you longing for?

In speaking to people through various conversations, zoom meetings and reading many articles about future church and what this pandemic might mean to the established church, what is coming across again and again is the need for community. The need to be connected with others because there is a common bond. Hockey, soccer, football, basketball and all other team sports have a common goal when the game is played. To win by scoring points- this is what calls players together, to build personal skills and together focus on the way of winning.

This is also true of others listening to orchestras, bands or music played by a DJ. It is in the act of listening that brings us together. It is the way in which people with similar interests gather and share experiences of something which touches them emotionally. And it is also true when people gather in the name of Jesus Christ because wherever 2-3 gather His Spirit is present. And in this virtual gathering-the Spirit is here because our focus is on Jesus. He is the reason we can live with hope in our hearts, he is the reason we can grieve losses but have faith

to carry on. He is the way which leads us to life and peace and calls us to be as one, today and in this moment!

In our reading from John 14 Jesus says: I am the way the truth and the life. A chorus I learned many years ago states: "I am the way the truth and the life. That's what Jesus said. Without the way, there is no going, without the truth there is no knowing, and without the life there is no growing. I am the way, the truth and the life, that's what Jesus said.."

This statement has been debated over and over again. Is Jesus the only way to God the Father? For Christians the answer is yes. For people of other faiths the answer coming from their perspectives is no because they have placed their lives differently. Yet we believe that we are all God's children through our theology of inclusivity. But there are many followers of the way of Christ who, state that we as Christians must continue to share and tell the story of Jesus with those who believe otherwise in order to change their thoughts and beliefs. This is often very difficult to do if we ourselves are not clear in knowing the way of Christ. And this question is the one raised by Thomas to Jesus prior to Jesus' betrayal and denial.

Our scripture reading from John 14 is also a help in these uncertain times when we might have doubts about our relationship, our knowledge our path and the way of Christ. Jesus said, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places, If it were not so (that is not true) would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And 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. And you know the way to the place where I am going.

And then Thomas states, "Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Thomas was confused about what Jesus was referring to. Jesus knew that he was going to die and rise again. He also knew that he would return to God the Father in heaven. But Thomas was not understanding this at all. Jesus tries to explain to the disciples including Thomas and Philip. Jesus asks them, "Do you know me or who I am? Do you know believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? Believe me. I and the Father are one."

This is where many people wonder, what is the way to the Father—God and Jesus is God's Son yet Jesus says they are one and that the Father is in him and he is in the father. How do we explain this? Jesus is God and so is the Spirit that calls us together today—this is God 3 in one, the Trinity. Yet when Jesus is teaching his disciples they just don't understand. Jesus is the way- because he is God. Jesus pleads with Philip and Thomas—believe me—and he is

telling them truth. They just don't get it at this point. And if we had been with them in that place and time, we probably wouldn't either as this takes place before Jesus' death on the cross. Their eyes have not yet been fully opened nor has their heart received the full message of the Jesus' purpose of saving people and reconciling them with God.

Jesus is God and Jesus is Spirit- like an interwoven triangle, 3 in 1 and it is through this understanding of God that we can relate to each other as one family in Christ together. This is because we connect with God in different ways and at different times—like seeing the beauty of creation made by Creator =Father; feeling the Spirit's presence as we breathe and hope and experience Jesus' voice teaching us to love. We are God's creation and God leads us as it is God who gives us life on Earth and offers us life eternally with Him where Jesus is preparing the mansions for us. We are children of one family- the family of God. But how do we receive the joy that God offers us? By simply seeking out God, and asking. If we ask God for anything in Jesus' name, God will answer.

How do we connect as a family of God? We have received the gift of mercy from God that is, through Jesus' death and resurrection we can ask God to forgive us for our sins and we are forgiven. But we must believe in Jesus and if we say we are Christian we have been forgiven and have received God's mercy. We are to open our hearts to be living stones as Peter writes. Living stones are those people who are chosen and precious in God's sight. They are the ones who believe, take heart and live with a strong faith. The one who unites us is Jesus- our rock and our guide, our way our life. We are living stones and when we are gathered our focus is on Christ the cornerstone who is the key and lock which binds us as one with each other and one with God.

Many churches are being creative in how they stay separate but together during these weeks of the pandemic. If only we could measure the phone calls, the drive bys the greetings online and in yards, drop offs and pick ups- it is truly remarkable! But what is key or at the cornerstone of it all is Jesus. We are reaching out because we love others and this is what he asks us to do-his way, with truth so that we might have a full life. As Christians we follow Jesus and through his resurrection we have hope beyond this life, this time of social distancing and beyond what it means to be physically apart. For we are one in Christ because the Spirit of God, the Father is in each of us. We just need to show it!

How are you doing? As we have looked at the relationship between God- Father, Son and Spirit and us as individuals do you realize what Jesus really did for you? He could have

said, no way, am I going to die and rise for those people yet to be born and living in 2020. Why should I? They don't get what it means to follow me- my way. But he did die and rise again. This is historic truth- fact. And because we can feel his presence and that of the Spirit and the Father even in this moment- we need to praise him and give thanks that we are a part of God's family. We are children in faith, brothers and sisters with those who are also watching this livestream service, and we love each other because we have this bond of love—Christ in you meets the Christ in me and we are One because the Spirit binds us together.

Let us pray.

God we pray that you would bind us together as your family in faith. We are separated right now but we are One in Christ Jesus because he died and rose again for each one of us. To us Jesus is our friend who showed us what love really is when he gave up his life for us. Help us to live love and to believe in you, and to trust that Jesus is the way the truth and life. Hear our prayers as we offer our lives to you. SILENCE. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: we are going to play a special song right now called "Family of God" It was written by Bill and Gloria Gaither in the 1980s and the chorus is often found in songbooks and chorus books:

"I'm so glad, I'm a part of the family of God; I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by his blood, Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, I'm a part of the family, the family of God."