

It's the season of Easter, but this week we're going to travel back in time. We go back to the farewell discourses Jesus offered his disciples in the days leading up to his death. Jesus seeks to tell his disciples what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen.

Jesus knows his ministry has crossed a point of no return. He's been branded too radical, and too seditious by the local authorities, and it's only a matter of time before he's seized, and ultimately put to death. But for John's author, Jesus understands the last part of the story in a sequence of three events: first death; then resurrection; then ascension. Like every human being, the physical life of Jesus is fleeting, and will end in death. Easter will demonstrate that his death is not a finite end. But resurrection is only a transitional stage. The "next-ness" of Jesus will be ascension, a state of ultimate connectedness with God.

The identity of Jesus has been made clear since the beginning of John's Gospel. In the very beginning, even before Creation, there is a source, or an energy, or an umph, that John calls the Word. It's this source that gives light and life. It's this source that is God. And somehow, someday, at a particular point in human history, this very source, the Word, manifested itself in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. We call this the incarnation of God. Those who experience this presence with authenticity will find connectedness to God – they will know the truth and grace of God. And their knowledge of this truth and grace will help others to know God as well.

In Jesus, the disciples, both the ones the story names AND the many others it doesn't, get to experience God in the relationships they form with Jesus and one another. But this morning, they are having to come to terms with the fact that the incarnation is about to end. It's already hard enough for them to believe that they've known God, even in the

broadest sense, by knowing Jesus. And they are anxious, scared, sad, grieving, because is anyone ever ready for the end of purposeful, meaningful, valuable relationships and seasons?

Do we think we've ever had enough or too much time with people we love, or with seasons that fill us with purpose, comfort, and joy? As so many of us might ask in seasons of transitions, the disciples ask Jesus, "What are we gonna do without you?"

Jesus begins with a word of comfort. Do not let your hearts be troubled. It's okay. Believe in the experiences we've shared together. This is real. This is authentic. Believe in the goodness of God. And believe that I represent that goodness, too.

There's talk of a house with many rooms. What Jesus is really saying is that he's rejoining a source that's got more than enough space to be present, and connected, and undergirded in the consciousness of all creation. Jesus explains that he's living his life in such a way as to channel the divine, and be a window of entry for others to channel a similar connectivity. You know where I'm going. You know how I am living. "You the know way," Jesus says.

And here comes Thomas. He's a visual learner. It's not so much that he doesn't believe Jesus, as much as he wants to be prepared, have a plan, be able to think a little more with his brain than with his heart or his spirit. And he's a tad more literal. If there's a way, that means there's a map. Gimme the address so I can put it in the GPS!

"No, Jesus," Thomas says, "We don't know the way. We are not sure how to find you. Please jot it down for us before you go."

And here's where we get to the meat of the text. Jesus is going to offer a response to Thomas. And his response needs to be taken into context. Don't use it as a one-liner or bumper sticker to demonstrate the exclusivity or primacy of the Christian faith – that's NOT what it's for.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Jesus is not laying out a universal condition for belief – he's not instituting a code of conformity for future generations to follow. Jesus is speaking directly to the experience of Thomas and the disciples who have lived this journey with him. This is a word of personal encouragement. "Hey, Thomas, you've got this, because I've got you. This is real. You are real. We are real."

"Thomas," Jesus says, "My life with you – one of empathy, shared vulnerability, hope, service, love, faith – that's the way, that's the truth, that's the life. It is wholly and fully rooted in the source that grounds me. I am the child of this source – I am a child of God. And if you know me (and trust me you do!), you know God also. Be at peace, be assured, that moving forward, you do know God, you have seen God, you presently experience God in your life."

This should be the end of the dialogue. If Jesus had said that to me, we'd be in full-on bro-hug mode. "You had me at, hello, Jesus." But it's not. Because we humans are anxious. And sometimes we need to hear things a lot, even from the people we love, admire, and trust the most, to believe in our own abilities.

So...Philip has to jump into the conversation. “Not to ruin this beautiful moment, Jesus, but, um, if you could just show us the Father, or the source, that’d be really helpful. Is there maybe a selfie you’ve got or something?”

Jesus reiterates to Philip, maybe with a sense of exasperation, his earlier comments to Thomas. You know me. Therefore, you know the source. We’re interconnected. Do you really not see it, or feel it, or grasp it? I assure you, you know me, and you know the source, and because you know and see me, you know God.

And this part is interesting. Jesus tells Philip that there’s more work to be done, in fact even more impressive work than has already been done. There’s a multiplier effect. The work of future disciples reveals God’s presence in even more potent and palpable ways.

There’s something very subtle that’s happened in the text. And it links directly back to the passage about Thomas we discussed on the Second Sunday of Easter. If you were here, we read the passage where Thomas is absent from the resurrection day appearances, and asks to touch the wounds of Jesus, in order that he might believe. After this encounter, Thomas expresses one of the most profound statements of faith in all of scripture: “My Lord, and My God.” Thomas sees, and now he believes.

In what is too often interpreted as a condescending response to Thomas, Jesus, and I’m paraphrasing, replies: “You believe, because you have seen. But blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.”

The response of Jesus is not a rebuke of Thomas, but rather a reminder that still others, those who have not been able to occupy this specific

moment of intimacy and familiarity Jesus, will both experience the Jesus story and the connection of God.

If you are keeping score at home, the pre-Easter Jesus reminds the disciples that they have indeed known God, because of their relationship with Jesus, and this credential will empower them to work on God's behalf in even more credentialed ways. And the post-Easter Jesus, the one who comes bearing all the additional proof the pre-Easter Thomas, Philip, and the others were seeking, reminds them that others, who have not been there to see for themselves, will also come to believe, and be blessed with the presence of God.

And all of this is happening while the Word, which manifested itself in humanity, has returned to the parent or source, even more vital than before. And the source, the very bosom of God, is now, even more spacious, and open than it was before.

It all kind of upends the idea of an exclusive and primary witness of God, doesn't it? Instead, the text reminds us of the remarkably creative, innovative, and inclusive substance that is our very source. God is a great mystery, and yet all of us have the potential to not only know and experience God, but to also be exponentially-more transformative expressions of God's goodness. God isn't a revelation. God is an infinite stream of revelations! And every generation is an ever-increasing amplifier of those revelations.

Here's what gets me really excited about today's text, Sardis. God is revealed in each of us. Everyone of us, in the way we love and care for one another, in simply being ourselves, in the sharing and receiving of our own unique gifts, has the capacity to reveal the substance of God. And our distance from Jesus, both spatially and historically, does not

*Ways*  
Bob Stillerman  
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John 14:1-14



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progressive  
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dilute the authenticity of our expressions. That is to say, God will continue to create new pathways for us to be God's people. We are enough. And we know the presence of God. We know the way! May God give us the courage to put one foot in front of the other.

Amen.