

Many Rooms

It's not really much of a wonder that the disciples were a little confused about this whole thing. A lot of them were really, truly expecting that Jesus was going to open up the heavens at any minute and reveal a truth that could not be denied or ignored by the world. So when Jesus starts talking like this, about where they are going, and the Father's house, their ears prick up a bit. This sounds like the start of something promising, something where they are going to get to be up on the top of the world for a change.

Thomas asks for clarification: "how are we supposed to proceed? We don't really get a lot of what you're talking about sometimes."

Jesus says, All you have to do is watch me, and do what I do, "I am the road, also the truth, also the Life." You keep looking for something big and overwhelming and missing what I am doing right here with each one of these sinners that I meet. You see how I am with you, and with the people we encounter? That's how you're supposed to be with everyone.

Philip's not happy with that though, he wants a high and mighty God, not a God who is right out there in the middle of all the mess.

Jesus is a little more frustrated, "you have been with me all this time..." I think that probably applies doubly to those of us walking around today calling ourselves Jesus' followers. You have probably heard this old joke, it's one of those preacher jokes, and I apologize in advance. A guy dies and goes to heaven and he is getting the tour from St. Peter. They walk down this long hallway and there are different things happening in all the rooms. In some rooms there is singing and dancing, he asks who those folks are. "Oh those are the Pentecostals." In another room there are people lighting candles and incense and talking with a woman who has the most peaceful smile on her face, he asks who they are. "Those are the Catholics talking to Mary." In another room there are people just sitting quietly, "let me guess the Quakers?" "You're learning," Peter says. Finally they come to a door that is locked and there is a big red sign that says, "Do not disturb." "Okay, who is in there?" "Oh those are the Presbyterians (or whatever denomination you're trying to poke fun at), they think they're the only ones here."

The thing is, that's how most of us function, even if we don't say it quite that openly. When we think about our ideas of God, we think we must somehow be right and others must certainly be wrong. Maybe it doesn't even matter that much anymore, but we are still tempted to think that way and it causes us to miss some pretty important stuff about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father apart from me," is often used as a definitive statement of the exclusive truth claim of Christian faith. I won't argue with the fact that it does in fact imply that Jesus is the road, as Eugene puts it, and there aren't a whole bunch of different routes that get you to the living reality of God. But in context, using it as an exclusionary text is really, really missing the point. "You have been with me all this time, and still you don't understand?" Look at what Jesus does, he always stretches the definition of who is in. "Believe what you see." When you see Jesus getting disapproved by the religious folks of his day because he ate with people they considered sinners, "believe what you see." When you see Jesus calling those who lord their righteousness over others "a brood of vipers," believe what you see. When you see Jesus healing, feeding, teaching and prophesying all over the place, regardless of whether the people he was healing,

feeding and teaching were “the right sort of people,” believe what you see. That was not a freak accident.

If you are tempted to think that you have figured out the only way to follow Jesus, remember that there are many rooms in the Father’s house, but only one way to get there, Jesus’s way. Put away the idea that Jesus is standing there guarding the gate, he’s too busy showing people how to get in. There is this balance in the way of Jesus that we forget sometimes, we can pull too far one way or another. We can pull towards the self-righteousness of the Pharisee or towards the wishy-washy nonsense of anything goes. The variety of the Father’s house is not a design flaw, it is part of the glory. The clarity of Jesus as the road should not ever be used as a weapon against the very sinners who need to be on it.

In Jesus, we should see how God is. Unfortunately, we too often think that Jesus is just the intermediary that saves us from God’s just and terrible wrath. That’s bad theology, and it doesn’t get better just because a lot of people repeat it. When we see Jesus we see the Father, we see how God really is, we see that God meets sinners on the road, and sits at table with broken people. We see that the thing that angers God more than anything else is people using his name in vain, and I’m not just talking about swear words, I’m talking about using God’s name to justify your violence, or your selfishness, or your lack of caring for your neighbors.

Jesus prepares a place for us, but we need to remember that we’re not going to be alone in that place. We’re going to have to learn to get along with all kinds of people, we probably ought to start that about now.