

A Sermon for DaySpring

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“A Sermon about Too Many Things”

John 14: 23-29

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This sermon, in a preaching class, would get a bad grade because good sermons are about one thing. I'm not sure what this one's about... a lot of things, I think. This one is about a bunch of things because the text is.

For instance, it's about the way Jesus talks.

Ask a straight question... get a strange answer. That's the way the conversations went . . . at least in John's gospel. All of the conversations... every one of them, have this odd kind of disconnected quality about them.

Someone says something to Jesus... Nicodemus, for instance, **“We can tell you're a great teacher.”** And the strange reply from Jesus, **“You can't see the kingdom unless you're born again... or from above.”**

It's always like that, in every conversation...

Once with the disciples on the lake, **“Rabbi, how did you get over here so fast?”** Jesus: **“I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”** Well, okay . . .

That's the way Jesus talks in our text for today. Jesus is way down into this farewell discourse. And he's being so tender but so honest... **“I'm leaving... but don't let your hearts be troubled... I'm leaving but you'll still see me... The world won't see me but you will. I'll show myself to you who love me.”**

It's a goodbye discourse and Jesus meanders. And right in the middle of it, Judas raises a hand. John points out this is not Judas Iscariot... who'd already “left the building.” It's a different Judas... **“Son of James”** Luke calls him. So it's Judas Jamison. Nice ring but I'm thinking right about now he's wishing his parents had named him something else. But his name is “Judas” and he's stuck with it.

Judas Jamison raises his hand... **“Okay, Lord, how come you're going to show yourself to us and not to the world?”**

That's a very good question I think. Don't you? Haven't you ever wondered why, on the other side of the resurrection, Jesus only appeared to those who already believed in him?

Man... I'd sure have done that differently, were I running the resurrection. This was a terrible marketing job. Jesus could have made an eternal splash... and that's what Judas Jamison is getting at.

Tradition has it that this Judas was also a Zealot... meaning he was interested in a political coup . . . wanted to see Rome ousted. The Zealots dreamed about the people being set free. They didn't like Rome and probably weren't real fond of those who ran the temple either. They were revolutionaries... just like some of our forefathers and mothers were. Judas probably had said things like... **“Give me liberty or give me death”** along the way.

So, when he says... **“Jesus, why would you just appear to us and not to the world?”** he's saying, **“We can change things around here and change them in a**

hurry if you'll show up on Pilot's door step the day after he has you crucified."
Why just to us?

It's a good question. And I've asked similar ones of God. So, the sermon here is not about how Jesus talks, but the way God works. **"God, if you're there... why make this so hard?" "Why don't you give us a little more to go on?" "God... a few miracles would go a long way... you know."**

"We could whip this world into shape if you'd step up to the plate and do away with all this injustice and if you'd smash evil on the head once and for all."

That's what Judas was thinking... and he asks a straight question. And as usual, Jesus responds with something that sounds like he didn't hear.

"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching and my Father and I will come make our home in her heart."

Judas Jamison is thinking, **I thought I asked him about showing himself... Did he even hear me? What's that got to do with loving him? He' got it backwards.**

And so Jesus has him right where he wants him... asking another question to himself. **What's seeing have to do with loving?** He's asking a deeper question. Jesus is always teasing folks deeper. It's generally the only way we go there. He knows we have to work on things, especially within the soul.

Jesus knows that the insight we come to ourselves is worth more than 1000 little lessons someone tries to teach us. The truth really that transforms us is the truth that dawns in us.

Ask any of the teachers in the room... ask the therapists in the room. When is it people change? How do they grow? It's when they get it.

So rather than just answering his question right out... Jesus disorients Judas... by giving him the answer to the deeper question. How does anyone see spiritually? Now, that's what the sermon's about here--the process is important... The way we come to faith and to awareness is important...

Apparently, trusting really matters.

Because this is the way Jesus talks to any disciple and this is the way God works. Jesus teases us deeper and deeper and deeper and God doesn't raise up Jesus from the dead and parade him about. The work of faith is still ours to do. The journey matters.

This relationship that God wants with us and with the world isn't something we get to because we get some facts . . . some proof.

I never really got the hoopla over things like finding Noah's ark or the Shroud of Turin. Like if we found a big boat in the mountains folks would say, **"Okay, I believe in God now."**

Or if we validated a cloth, people would say, **"I'm trusting Christ now."**

God is always the One who reveals, but reveals in context of the great mystery. Hidden... shown... but never to the point of removing the necessity of trust. It's not

about the “facts ma'am” It’s about a real relationship to a living Lord. Loving precedes seeing. Is that what this sermon’s about?

Is that why Jesus answers this way? Yeah! He’s saying, I think whoever wants to see me is going to have to love me and the way you do that is by obeying my commandments. How does anyone come to see? You’ll see . . . If you love me . . . You’ll have loved me . . . when you’ve obeyed me. In Luke’s gospel Jesus says, **“Why in the world are you calling me Lord, Lord and not doing what I tell you to do?”**

Have you read the commandments of Jesus lately? In the monastic tradition this was the first work of asceticism . . . the first thing to practice. And they didn’t have in mind the Ten Commandments but rather the Sermon on the Mount.

Have you looked at this lately?

Have you looked with any intent of obeying?

The Ten Commandments are a breeze.

This new law goes way beyond getting your behavioral ducks in a row. Hearts are more complex work. **“You’ve heard it said... but... I’m saying to you now...”**

If you’re angry with your brother... if you curse your sister (RACA)... you may as well kill them.

Don’t even come to worship until you fix things... even if someone has something against you... leave this altar and go to that one. I wonder what our place would look like this morning if we obeyed Jesus? Would anybody be here?

Have you read this lately?

If you look at someone with lust... that’s adultery.

If someone strikes you, turn the other cheek.

If they steal your coat, give them your shirt.

Love your enemies...

pray for those who persecute you.

Don’t let anyone know when you do anything good.

Pray in private... fast without appearing to.

Don’t worry...

Don’t judge...

Only a few find the road that leads to life.

And people thought Moses was tough... This is advanced morality . . . advanced spirituality . . . it’s way beyond rule following, isn’t it?

When Jesus hears Judas’ question about his “appearing”... this is what he goes to. Because seeing... spiritually seeing and knowing... takes place at a level that is way beyond what the world can do.

The worldly part of us can’t see the risen Christ.

We can’t know... we can’t get it with worldly eyes.

Only a heart that has been fashioned and prepared.

We were talking at Lectionary Breakfast about what it does to you to take seriously the teachings of Jesus. And make sure when we say “The Teachings of Jesus,” in your mind you aren’t hearing, “The Teachings of Your Baptist Forbearers.” Don’t smoke, drink, dance, chew... John wants us to look seriously at what Jesus taught.

Anyway, we were talking about it and aware of how confronting it is to try this... To say, **“I’m going to obey Jesus... no more judgement ... no more ragging on ‘my enemies’.”** Two seconds later, you’re obsessed with the one that teed you off... **“Raca...”**

You say, **“I’m obeying Christ... I’m not going to care about my possessions so much.”** Then you see the Jones’s new kitchen next door. **“Honey, we really need a new kitchen, don’t we?”**

You start trying to follow and if you’re really honest, as someone in the group said, **“You are driven quickly to your knees... O God... do I ever need you and your grace... Don’t I need you and your transforming love in my life.”**

And perhaps then... from that place of profound need and profound grace things begin happen to us... and for us... and maybe then, we start seeing.

In my mind... it’s not that God sits in heaven saying, **“Follow the rules enough and I’ll show up.”** Not at all... it’s just that our souls must be shaped in order to see what God is revealing.

Those in the spiritual tradition tell us, “We become what we love.” The soul absorbs what we’re around. It’s impressionable. It begins assuming the qualities of what it identifies with and desires and loves. What the soul loves, it resembles. If we love Christ.

We obey Christ...

We act Christlike...

And then along the way... we are like Christ.

And we see the world differently...

And we see a risen Lord.

God is “at home” with us. We’ve made room . . . like we’ve created a space – which is now what the sermon is about. The Trinity dwells in you . . . home. Wow. Our task is simply making room.

Reminds me of an illustration I used to use with teenagers, preaching at youth camps. Let’s suppose that one of you invites me and Julie over for dinner. Perhaps you’re one of our prospects... getting to know the pastor, you know.

We arrive on time (right) and you’re behind... still in the kitchen putting on the finishing touches.

“Make yourself at home...” You say... **“Kick back... relax... I’ll be right with you.”** And you go back to your preparations.

After a while, you hear something odd in the den... You go in and we’re moving the couch... You look at us with profound curiosity.

“Well... You said ‘Make yourself at home’ and we really didn’t like the way the couch was facing . . . so we moved it.”

You think... **Okay... didn't see that coming... but you move on back to the meal still on the stove.**

Again... there's a noise... and you return to the den to see us moving a painting. **"What's up?"**

We say, **"It just doesn't go... Velvet Jesus just doesn't look good in this Early American room you have."**

Now, you're pretty sure you aren't joining our church but we're there and you've got to make the best of it. So . . . back to the kitchen.

Then you hear music – blaring . . . we're doing "the hustle."

Hey, we bought our own CDs – "Hope you like K. C. and the Sunshine Band."

Point— You really didn't mean "make yourself at home."

Is your heart, the kind of place, Father, Son, and Spirit can feel at home in. . . a kind of place the divine feels completely at home in. Large and loving enough . . . real enough—healed enough . . . wounded enough. It's something we say yes to but finally something . . . that God does. He knocks at the door... we say yes and then God makes himself at home.

I don't know about you . . . He still has a lot to do in me.

God has some rearranging to do in me . . . some redecorating. He will – He will make the human heart, home. So, heaven's in the heart . . . so, I guess, the sermon is about. Eternal life, the Divine, Father, Son, Spirit . . . in here... completely at home in here. Amen.

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The illustration about "making yourself at home" I first heard from Milton Brasher-Cunningham back in our "navel-gazing Baylor days." Just one of the million creative pictures that has sprung forth from his soul.