

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
May 3, 2026 – 5 Easter  
John 14:1-14  
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This morning's lesson from the Gospel of John is set in the time shortly before Jesus' crucifixion. It is a portion of what are called Jesus' "farewell discourses," his final words to his closest friends and followers, to the men he had called by name and who have been with him all through his years of ministry. Jesus has washed their feet to give them a memorable lesson about how they are to serve others. Jesus has shared a Last Supper with them, and during the meal Judas Iscariot has left the table, on his way to betray Jesus. The end of Jesus' life is near.

We can imagine the gathering. We can imagine how unsettled and anxious the men would have been, desperate perhaps to hear some words of comfort and promise from their Teacher. Always compassionate to the faithful, Jesus gives them the message they need to hear. "Don't worry. Trust God, as I do. I'm going ahead of you – through and past my death – home to our heavenly Father. And I will prepare places for you to be there, too, with me. Don't be troubled in heart. All will be well." In this Easter season of joy, we, too, hear the promise of eternal life with God that Jesus gave his followers before his death. Each Sunday we affirm our trust in God, our faith in the promises of our Lord.

Jesus says that there are "many dwelling places" in his Father's house. Many people – and I am one of them – take this to mean that there are several paths to God and room for all sorts of faithful, loving souls in God's heavenly house. But then we hear Jesus say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." That sounds like there is only one path to God – through Jesus. These words have been taken to mean that salvation comes only through Christianity. As you know, even in our own day there are Christians who believe that unless a person is a Christian – even a particular type of Christian – his or her life is on the wrong track, possibly on the road to hell.

The context of these words is key to understanding them. We all know that what we say and how we say what we say is influenced – sometimes very significantly influenced – by the circumstances we are in and the people we are speaking to. We also know that words taken out of context can be misunderstood and misinterpreted, often with very serious consequences. In this passage Jesus is speaking some of his last words to the men who had left everything to follow him. They have shared their lives with Jesus, heard his teaching, seen what he has done. For the eleven men to whom Jesus is speaking he is indeed "the way, the truth, and the life." His words are a last reminder to them to be faithful to Jesus when he is gone.

Jesus knows that his disciples will face hard times if they remain faithful. In a passage from the "farewell discourses" that follows what we heard today, Jesus says: "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you... If they persecuted me, they will persecute you... I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God....I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them" (John 15:18, 20; 16:1-4).

I think it is safe to say that for people who feel called by Jesus to follow him, he is "the way, the truth, and the life," just as he was for the eleven apostles. But there are also other paths to God, other ways God invites people to share in God's life. People are drawn to God's light and love through other religions, through the beauty of God's vast creation, through music

and art and literature, through human love shared between family members and friends, through the kindness of strangers, the companionship of animals. We cannot even imagine all the ways human beings are drawn to God.

God is the creator of everything, the beginning and the end. We creatures of God cannot claim to comprehend God or to know the mind of God. Our knowledge and understanding are so limited! We need to keep in mind our limitations. If you think about your life, how perfect is your understanding of your own spiritual path? How well do you comprehend when and where and through whom God has touched you from your birth until today? How often do you have a profound sense of mystery about life and about God? If our understanding of ourselves and our personal journeys is so partial and imperfect, how may we presume to know or judge the paths of others?

Christianity is only one of the world's major religions. How should we approach understanding other religions with proper appreciation and respect? Many people wise in the spiritual life – Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama, for example – encourage others to go deeper into their own tradition as a first step. There is always more to learn, and our spiritual practices can always expand and deepen. Keeping in mind the limits of our understanding of God as Christians, we can then be open to learn what other religions teach about God, how they emphasize different qualities of God, have different names for God and promote different spiritual practices from ours. Knowledge of other religions can thus broaden the way we think about God and about how human beings seek to worship, know and love God.

An important caution. We must not judge other religions by the behavior of some of its members who do what we find morally repulsive “in the name of” their faith. You and I would not want to be judged by the unspeakably horrible actions of people calling themselves Christians who have claimed that God is on their side even as they do what is utterly contrary to the teaching of Jesus. Addressing this issue, Jesus said to his followers, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” To those who do what is evil, Jesus said that on the Day of Judgment “I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

In the passage we heard this morning from the Gospel of John Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” His teaching and his actions reveal what we can comprehend of the nature of God. Jesus is “in the Father” and the Father is in him. Jesus calls us to a similar unity with him. He said, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit ... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:4-7). This passage clarifies what it means when Jesus says, “If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” Acting “in Jesus’ name” means acting according to his teaching and example, not simply saying the words “in Jesus’ name.”

Jesus taught and lived the Two Great Commandments set forth in Jewish scripture: to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. The important issue is love. Receiving love. Giving love. Growing in love. The dwelling places in God's house prepared for us by Christ are places of love. They could not be anything else but places of love. Led by Jesus, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and supported by the company of all faithful people, may we walk in love until we reach the eternal dwelling places of love in our Father's house prepared for us by Christ our Lord. Amen.