**May 10, 2020 – Easter V**

**John 14 :1-14**

Let me put this reading into context a little. It forms part of the “farewell discourses” or final teachings of Jesus.

The Last Supper has been shared, Judas has been quietly sent out to do his awful work, Jesus has washed the disciples’ feet and foretold Peter’s denial of him.

I think the tone of reassurance and hope in this passage is one of the main reasons for it being so often chosen for funerals and memorial services: it underlines the fact that physical death is not the end of the story for people of faith.

Jesus is sensitive to the feelings of concern and uncertainty among his disciples and seeks to reassure them about the future – “Set your troubles hearts at rest”.

After three years of discipleship and teaching, they are going to be left without their leader – at least physically. He detects their concern and uneasiness about this, and is at some pains to explain where he is going and why, and also that he will return for them.

Jesus wants them to be very sure that there will be no exclusions – a definite characteristic of the Jewish community, notably the Pharisee portion of it. “In my father’s house are many dwellings.” If there had not been room for all, Jesus would have told them, but who is “in” and who is “out” was never part of Jesus’ teaching, although sadly it has become part of the church’s teaching in many situations.

Jesus expresses his faith in them and in the fact that they have been absorbing his teaching for three years – “My way there is known to you”. Jesus means the way of the Cross and death which he has been telling them is going to happen.

But Thomas, who is clearly a very pragmatic sort of chap, really trusting only his own knowledge and experience, as we see later after the Resurrection, isn’t about to be satisfied with this vague, fuzzy stuff. He comes straight to the point – HIS point at least. “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

I don’t know if the answer he got was much more help to him, really. Jesus just reiterates, “I am the Way, I am the Truth and I am Life.” Interesting language: I am THE WAY, as opposed to any other possible way. I am THE TRUTH, as opposed to anything else masquerading as Truth. But notice the difference in the last statement, I AM LIFE. Not I am the life, as if there was another possible life, but I AM LIFE, the only other options being death.

And tying it all together – “No-one comes to the Father except by me” and “If you know me you would know my Father too.”

As we read a little further, we find Philip also pushing back about this last statement, and hear Jesus’ frustration with his density. Because in one way these disciples were as a group pretty dense – three years of classes, both theory and demonstration, and still they didn’t grasp the material. Is that an F grade or what?

And yet we can’t totally blame them, because Jesus’ teaching was so very counter-cultural and way outside their experience and previous knowledge. They probably weren’t the most educated of men to start with, and I always think that Jesus showed immense patience with them, explaining his point in different ways to try to be sure they “got it”. If he spoke in parables in public, we’re told that in private he explained it all to the Twelve.

Jesus goes to great pains to explain the unity of purpose between him and his father God, and points to his works as proof of that unity, which shows itself in obedience. He is also telling them that if they believe in him they will be empowered to do what he has being doing, and even more, because Jesus will be with God, able to answer their prayers and support them as they go about the ministry to which he has commissioned them.

So much for the actual situation described by John. What does it tell us for our Christian lives today? What can we learn from it?

Well, right from Jesus’ first words, we can take courage and comfort – “Set your troubled hearts at rest; trust in God always, trust also in me”. Isn’t that what faith means – if you believe in something, you trust it, you rely on it. Jesus is telling us we can always rely on God and rely on Jesus – as upholders, as guides, as protectors, as whatever we need at a given moment.

“I am going to prepare a place for you” – this earthly life is absolutely not all there is to it.

“I will come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also” – a promise of life everlasting and final resurrection.

And finally, Jesus’ answer to Thomas’ question.

**I am the Way** – follow the way I have shown you, how to live, how to behave, how to treat each other. Subtext: avoid the arrogant, self-righteous ways of the Pharisees and the uncaring ways of those who have no faith or belief and live only for their own ends.

**I am the Truth** – what I have taught you and shown you is true, reliable and in conformity with the Will of God. Subtext: the commandment of love trumps the pure but limited observance of the Law. That is why Jesus gave us a new commandment, to love one another and your neighbour as yourself.

**I am Life** – as I pointed out before, Life, not the Life as if there was any other – following this teaching and also contributing to spread it, means life – life in the Spirit, life in God. Subtext: following the letter of the Law, the old way, is an existence, a way of living but it is not life. Life is joyful, shared, encouraging, uplifting, rewarding and above all not a dead-end street.

In some ways this first part of verse 6, “I am the Way, the Truth and Life” is a neat summary of Jesus’ teaching, and in some sense a summary of the Gospels. We learn there how to live as authentic Christians, true to our calling to help bring about God’s kingdom on earth – the Way to live, the Truth to live by and proclaim and what Life in Christ really means, both for us and for the world.

Instead of being dense and uncomprehending like the apostles, can we grasp this momentous gift with both hands, rejoice in its promise and do our utmost to live by it on a daily basis?