

Text: John 14:1-6

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Most of you know that my family and I spent the first eight plus years of my ministry in Alaska. In many ways it was a wonderful experience. All but one of our children were born there. We still have fond memories. But there was one thing that was pretty hard. We didn't get the chance very often to travel back to Wisconsin, where all of our family lived. Some people talked about it as going home. On average, we probably got back here about once every two years. So when the time came to leave and come here on vacation, needless to say we looked forward to the opportunity with great anticipation.

A story is told that helps put "going home" into perspective. Years ago an old, retiring world missionary was sailing back to the United States for the last time after a lifetime on the mission field in Africa. On the same ship was President Teddy Roosevelt who had been in Africa on one of his famous hunting expeditions. The missionary and his wife couldn't help notice how much attention the President was getting from the press. As the trip wore on, the missionary became more and more irritated and finally confided in his wife that he was upset with the Lord. "Something is wrong," he said. "Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these many years and have no one care a thing about us? Here this man comes back from a hunting trip and everybody makes much about him, but nobody gives two hoots about us!"

When they arrived in New York, it was only worse. The old couple slipped off the ship without notice and the full throng of New York press was after the President. The mayor and local dignitaries were there to greet him. Time went by and the couple found an apartment in New York. But their arrival in New York could leave the old missionary's mind. Finally, the he couldn't take it any more. He spouted off again to his wife, who suggested that he take the issue to the Lord in prayer. A short time later he came back, but now his face was completely different. His wife asked, "Dear, what happened?"

"The Lord settled it with me," he said. "I told him how bitter I was that the President should receive this tremendous homecoming, when no one met us as we returned home. And when I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put his hand on my shoulder and simply said, "But you're not home yet."

And neither are we. Jesus addresses us today on the issue of going home. He does it in words that he shared with his close disciples nearly 2000 years ago. And He gives us every reason for excitement. He reminds us that:

We're Looking Forward to Our Journey Home!

- 1. We're preparing to go to our Father's House.**
- 2. The only way to get there is through Jesus Christ.**

1. We're preparing to go to our Father's House.

As you heard the Gospel before, Jesus was talking to the disciples on the night before He died. This wasn't the first time that the subject of his going away had come up. Jesus had made it clear that He was going home -- returning to the Heavenly Father who had sent Him. He also made it clear that the disciples couldn't follow -- not now.

And that's what prompted His opening words. *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." (John 14:1)* It is as if He were saying, "My going away is not going to be to your detriment, but for your benefit." And then He includes all of them in the purpose of His departure. *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:2-3)* Yes, He was going away, but the end result would be that all of these disciples -- and all future disciples -- would one day be with Him in His Father's House.

Jesus was about to leave this earth to make His Father's house their house. And today, as we recognize that the very Jesus who said *"I am with you always, to the very end of the age,"* is no longer physically with us, we too need to know that He's left to make the Father's house our house. In the case of Jesus disciples, it offered them comfort, even though they didn't fully comprehend it. He said to them, *"You know the way to the place where I am going."* (John 14:4) This seems to have left the disciples, especially the skeptical Thomas, a little bit cold. *"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'"* (John 14:5) Actually what he said was not true. They did know where He was going. They just didn't know they knew! Because of all of the things that Jesus had said to them and taught them over the last three years, they had the knowledge, once they got beyond their own initial emotional response, to know the exact way to their Father's house.

And Jesus' disciples today have the same knowledge and confidence. We can daily look forward to the journey home because we know that the journey will end at our Father's house in heaven. Those days may come where we feel abandoned by Jesus because He's already returned to the Father. We might be experiencing, family troubles, physical suffering, chronic pain, disappointment, anxiety, loneliness, or a thousand other feelings. In those cases, we have one promise for the here and now. The Lord says, *"Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you."* But the Good News is that there is also a promise for the future. Jesus said, *"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* (John 14:3)

And now that our forever is secured by Jesus' promises, we can get on with our present. St. Peter puts that in perspective. *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* (1 Peter 2:9) He can call us those names because Jesus, with His life and death, has made us those things. But then He tells us God's reason, which doubles as our purpose for living. *"... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* God leaves us here only as long as we can serve him. Once that purpose is done, He'll take us home. And that's exactly why He says, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled."*

Part of the fun of going home is anticipating and preparing for the trip. Just ask any college student, service man or woman, or anyone who has been away from family for an extended period of time. But even when the destination is certain, the way of getting there may be uncertain. There may be a variety of options. "Planes, trains or automobiles" are often the selection. And isn't that exactly what Thomas' problem was? He wanted to know the way. That's why Jesus was preparing Him for the journey home. He showed him that

2. The Only Way to get there is through Jesus Christ.

We recall the conversation. *"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'"* 6 Jesus answered, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:5-6) Jesus knew that the uncertainty of Thomas and the rest was more due to confusion than ignorance. The word "way" that Thomas used was referring to a road, a lifestyle, or a price of admission. It never occurred to Him that the "way" was through a relationship with a person.

And before we are too hard on these first century disciples, we need to realize that people today make the same mistake. They might think that things or a lifestyle or a bank account will get them to heaven. But the truth, according to God, is that the "way" is through a person, our Savior and brother, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *"I am the way . . ."* That still seems rather obscure unless we use a picture. How far could you drive your car through a farm field that was partially covered with water. Not far! You'd go a ways and soon would find yourself mired in the mud. But do you know that we do just that each day, this time of year. We drive through muddy farm fields without a problem because a firm, paved roadbed has been built through it.

Jesus is that roadbed that is moving us toward our heavenly home, sins and all. In other words, He's not only the guide, He is the WAY. As the Way, he provides the bridge over the huge gulf of our sins by taking them away with His cross. He also tells us that He is the "Truth" and the "Life." We know how precious each of those is in our lives. To take Jesus words with a slight difference, he says, "Without me, there is no way, no truth, and no life." The Apostles said, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12) Jesus is the Way, the only Way.

The reason that Jesus was so clear, so blunt with His disciples, was that He knew the tremendous distractions that they would face in the next days, months, and years. He wanted them to stay focused on their heavenly home as well as on the only Way, Jesus, as they lived their lives for Him.

And how important that is for us. There are a lot of things going on in our lives. Each has a different list, but most are long. We have a lot of things going on in our church. I hope that you will agree with me that most of them are good. But all of these can be distractions. Whenever we're weary, whenever we're stressed, whenever we're sad, whenever we're discouraged, remember one important truth. We're going home. We're going home because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Most of us look forward to a trip. But none of those trips can compare with our journey home. May God preserve us in our faith so that one day we may meet in our Father's house as one big, happy family -- God's family. One day we'll realize that blessing because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Amen.