

John 14 – Words of Comfort and of Challenge

I don't know how many of you have ever done the D of E – the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. I never did. But I know this:

As you progress through the awards, Bronze... Silver... Gold, there are various things you need to do. One of the harder things, is an expedition.

I want you to imagine a young person out on their D of E gold expedition, they've got a route they're trying to follow across the Yorkshire moors. They are in a team, I think it's 3, and team work is part of the point, but this team doesn't contain any experts – they're mates from school.

In fact, as they've gone through Bronze and Silver badges, and done their training, they've always been with their leader, who has looked after them every step of the way.

But now, on the gold expedition, they're alone.

They're out on the moors, no other people for miles around, and darkness is closing in. You can imagine that they might feel cold, worried, lost, alone. They might wish their leader was there with them –when they're not.

Imagine how they'd feel if they were lost, they don't know where they are, and how they are going to get to where they are going, they don't know which path to take. They might start to think that *any* path is a good path, and it doesn't matter which way they go, but that might get them into trouble!

Can you imagine it? Can you imagine how someone would feel in that situation?

I think that provides a helpful parallel to how some people view the Christian life, and perhaps how the disciples were feeling in John 14.

Do you understand what I mean, sometimes you might feel like God isn't there, you feel lost, you want to know which way to go?

And as Christians, we don't see God face to face, he doesn't talk to us and lead us like that. I bet sometimes you wish he would?

So we might feel at times like those kids: like our leader, our teacher, isn't helping, and we're not sure where we are and where to go.

There are all sorts of things which might happen in our lives to make us feel lost like this – sometimes big things, sometimes little things, sometimes we might feel like that for no reason in particular.

But the passage raises one particular struggle, how we might feel when we lose someone we love. Because the disciples were about to lose Jesus.

And if you've ever felt deep grief, it can be one of the darkest times... A time when you ask big questions, and when you might feel like God has left you, or wonder if he is still looking after you?

Like the kids on the marshes, you might feel like your leader isn't around when you need him. That's exactly what the disciples feared in John 14:

In John 13:33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

So Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?"

Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."

Jesus is going, and just like the group of school children on the D of E award the disciples aren't exactly a crack team!

So they are afraid, upset and above all very confused.

And although Jesus is upset too, and as he heads to the cross you might expect that the disciples would be giving *him* emotional support and encouragement, instead he is comforting them.

So what does Jesus have to tell them? And what does he have to tell us (or remind us of) this morning?

- 1) Jesus really is the only way to know God
- 2) Jesus gets his people to the destination of heaven
- 3) Jesus stays with his people on the journey of life.

And I hope you can see how even though Jesus is going away, if the disciples really believed and grasped hold of those things, they would find comfort wouldn't they?

And we too, if we really believe and grasp hold of these truths, will find stability in our struggles, hope and even peace in the midst of our struggles, so we can keep going in the journey.

Let's look at them, firstly

- 1) Jesus really is the only way to know God.

It's a very common idea isn't it, these days, that "as long as you believe something" that's ok.

People might even say, "yea I believe in God" but if you asked a little more, they wouldn't say they make a habit of praying, or that they follow Jesus...

Jesus makes it really clear here, right from the start.

Talking to people who are really upset, he says v1

"You believe in God? believe also in me"

Which already begins to say that "believing in God" might not be enough, but that Jesus says you must believe in *him*.

And then of course he says even more v5

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. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well"

It's clear isn't it? I think it's clear!

No one comes to the father, except through me.

Which is more than just saying "I am the way to the father" it's much more like saying "I am the *only* way to the father"

Translate that to more modern language, and it means

"The only way to know God, is to know Jesus. Without faith in Jesus, you do not know God, and you cannot. But with faith in Jesus, you will know and do know God"

v7 – "If you really know me, you will know my father as well"

It can be really hard to say what's *not* true can't it?

If you're speaking with a friend and they say what they think, say:

"I think that anyone who tries their best to do the right thing is living the right way"

It's quite easy to say "I think that it's not about what **we** do, but about whether we trust Jesus, we need to follow him"

But much *harder* to say "and I think that anyone who *doesn't* trust in Jesus and follow him, isn't going to be ok; they'll be cut off from God one day"

Much harder to say what *isn't* true, as well as what is true.

Why? Because that's the 'exclusive' part of the claim.

But if we do have the courage to say that, we're following Jesus, because he said

"I am the way and the truth and the life, **no one** comes to the father, except through me."

Now, remember that Jesus says this in order to comfort them, they are distressed and feeling lost – like lost children.

I guess so that they will stick with him, and not try any other way!

(which would be very foolish)

The second thing Jesus says, is that he's going to come back and one day bring them to heaven with him.

2 Jesus gets his people to the destination of heaven

The story is told about a curate, the job I do (but it wasn't me), who was conducting a funeral.

The green book; with the funeral service in, has these little titles for each part of the service.

At the end, as the service draws to a close, there is a little title, *the commendation*.

The nervous curate hadn't taken too many funerals before and nervously (and terribly) said "we now come to the resurrection".

Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could do that, in funerals I take, simply turn to the coffin and raise the person back to life!!

Jesus could do that, he did that for people as part of his ministry. And in these verses he explains to the disciples, that's what he'll do for them, and that's why he's going away.

I talk about these verses at funerals, often.

But in one sense today I am *more pleased* to be speaking about them with you – because it's not too late.

Think for a moment of those kids on the marshes. Remember, like the disciples they are scared, lost and uncertain.

So here's my question: Does it make a difference if they can see the destination in the distance?

Of course it does! It changes everything!

If they can see the destination in the distance, even if they are in a bog, even if their shoes are filling with water – they know they're going to be ok.

Suddenly they don't feel lost. They may not know how to get there, but they feel safer, calmer, happier, when they see their destination.

Some people say: "it's fine to believe in heaven, and maybe that will help you one day, but it doesn't help you *now* does it?"

And the answer is... yes it does! Knowing your future changes things for you *now*!

Like seeing the destination changes how those kids on the marshes would feel.

The same is true for the disciples and us as Christians. If we know Jesus is going to bring us to heaven, it does make a difference.

And our book of the month this month "living in the light of eternity" is all about that – it's mentioned in the grapevine and you can have a little look at a copy on the bookstall!

So let's look at exactly what Jesus says...

"My Father's house has many rooms; [*lots of space*]

if that were not so, would I have told you that 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.”

Let me say a few things.

Firstly, when Jesus talks about preparing a place – he doesn’t mean what some of us might do when we prepare for guests.

He’s not Hoovering and tidying in heaven, he’s not fluffing pillows and making the bed.

‘Preparing a place’ means putting your name on the guest-list, making a little plaque with your name on it and putting it on the door.

If you’re a Christian, Jesus has given you your very own place in heaven. Your name is on the guest-list, you have your own place with a name plaque on, just for you, it’s ready.

And Jesus died for your sin and rose again in order to do that. The place is now ready.

And having gone to all that effort, do you think he’s going to let you miss your booking? NO!

“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”

Do you see why this is so comforting! They’ll get there!

We also need to notice just how personal the language is.

If you book your holiday you might get an email saying

“Dear Mr Freyhan, thank you for your booking, we have reserved a room for you on 18th September...”

Factual.

Jesus is all about relationship.

I will prepare your place, and I will come and get you, so that you will be able to be with **me** where I belong – and you belong.

We’ll be close to God and close to Jesus, that’s the point of v10, and that’s just what the disciples needed to hear in their distress.

And if you’re distressed, when you’re distressed, that’s just what you’ll need to hear too!

But Jesus has even more comfort, as he speaks about the Holy Spirit, and promises not to leave them as orphans, without a master and leader.

3. Jesus stays with his people on the journey of life.

I guess, although I like that illustration of the kids lost on the marshes – it’s not a *perfect* illustration, because the leader was not *with* the kids, that was the whole point.

But although Jesus is leaving his disciples, he also promises that he will make sure **God is with them**.

Look down at v16, you need to see this yourselves.

“If you love me, keep my commands, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate, another counsellor, to help you **and be with you forever**”

So if you are a Christian, God has never left you, and he will never leave you, he is with you, and will be with you forever, because Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be in you.

v18 “I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you”.

Why is that such a help at a dark time?

Well because of what the Spirit does inside of you!

The Holy Spirit helps us **see** Jesus.

I’ll try to be really clear what that means in a moment, but let’s just see it in the passage.

v19 “before long the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me” - that’s what the Holy Spirit will do

End of v21 “the one who loves me will be loved by my father, and I too will love them, and show myself to them”

v26 “The Holy Spirit, who the father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you”

I hope that’s clear, one of the things the Holy Spirit does, and the main thing he does which this passage teaches us about, is he helps us to ‘see’ Jesus.

In fact, whatever that means, and I’m going to explain in a second, that is what *brings peace*.

Jesus sending the Spirit to us is what gives us peace, deep inside, in a way the world can’t give, why? Because we see Jesus.

What does that mean – well, it doesn’t mean they still see Jesus with their eyes – because Jesus was just about to be taken away. Which is good news for us, because we can’t see him with our eyes either.

It means see him with eyes of faith.

And that means, to see what he’s like.

To know his character, and love it.

To know his wishes, and want them.

To know his frustration and share it.

To know his care, and be comforted by it.

To be close to him – that is what it means to see him, by faith.

That’s why when he talks about prayer, he can say something like

“You may ask me for anything, in my name, and I will do it”

It’s not a blank cheque prayer: “anything you want, from God”

It’s that as we see him, we draw closer to him, we want what he wants, and we ask him for something he is delighted to give! We ask in line with his will, and he gives it.

When you’re in a really dark time, what you need, is to see the light! – to see Jesus.

When Job (the guy in the OT, who if you don’t know has a whole book about his struggles). He lost everything, and was thoroughly miserable... eventually after a long time, God came to him and made everything a whole lot better, the way he did that was by showing Job what he was like.

If you struggle, or those close to you struggle, or feel like you’re lost.

It isn’t knowing what the future is going to hold, exactly how and when; It isn’t necessarily having the problem taken away and fixed, that brings the peace of God...

It’s seeing Jesus. That brings the peace of God, even *in* struggles.

And that’s the work of the Holy Spirit!

I find this... when things are hard, I start to focus on myself and the problem, and take my eyes off God – do you find that?

When we look ‘down’ as it were, we’ll only lose peace!

The work of the spirit is to help us to see Jesus.

We need to keep our head up, we need to keep looking up.

When a Christian suffers and they call out to God, even if they say some tough things, I don’t worry – because they’re looking up.

I worry when they start to look down, and can’t see his blessings, his kindness – which there still are. Do you find that?

If you’re really struggling, the thing you need to do is come to God, pray (like Jesus did actually, in the Garden), talk to fellow Christians for support, and read the words of scripture which the Holy

Spirit inspired. And as you do, the Spirit will help you see Jesus – and then you will know the peace that the Lord gives!

We all need to see Jesus, he is the only way to know God,
he gets his people to the end of the journey, to heaven,
and he stays with us and helps us along the way, by his Spirit.

Let's pray.

Father, help us to believe this, to know our future is certain, and to come to Jesus, and not rely on any other way.

Stay close to us, show us what you're like, and cause us to *run to you* when we struggle. Amen.