

POINTS TO PONDER

"Do not let your hearts be despaired. Trust in God; trust also in me."

— *John 14.1*

"While this passage has often been translated with the word, 'troubled,' instead of 'despaired,' it makes more sense with the latter word. We all get troubled at times. It is inevitable, and there is no way from keeping this from happening when we witness evil in the world. But while trouble invades our lives without our ability to defend against it, despair is something that we allow to happen to us when we let those troubles fester within us.

Despair is also difficult to oppose; but it is possible. We can think, imagine, and act so as to keep ourselves from despair. And Jesus is telling us that the way to do this is to trust in the example that he has set before us with his own life and teachings – those of nonviolence and peace, of loving-kindness and mercy, of equity in justice, and of forgiveness and restoration. When we trust in these values rather than the values that our society would have us to keep, we are transformed from despair to hope – not necessarily because things will work out the way we want them to, but because we have the values that give us meaning and purpose even when it seems we lose every battle."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/3/2023*

"In my Parent's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ Where I am going you know, and the way you know."

— *John 14.2-4*

"Jesus' Parent is our Parent, too. God is the one who made us all and declared us all as children. God wants us to all live in the same dwelling place of peace, justice, and love for one another.

Of course, this dwelling place is not a literal place that takes up physical space. Rather it is a spiritual place where we may all abide if we all adopt the same virtues and values. For that reason, there is infinite room for all us to dwell therein. There is always occupancy and room for each of us; if only we choose to live by the way of that sacred lifestyle.

To follow Christ means that more room is made for us in following the same example of Christ. And Jesus comes into our lives, not when we believe that he and he alone is capable of living by God's way, but rather when we ourselves trust that we can and will live by that same way. We are present with Jesus when we share that same spirit that was in him. We know where that is because we have witnessed his own virtues and values made manifest by his teachings and works of goodness. His way we know because we have witnessed that way revealed by his life.

Are we ready to give up our own living spaces and the values that perpetuate them in order to live in the presence of God's own way? Is it in God's house, or our own, that we find true comfort and meaning in life?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/3/2023*

"Thomas said to him, 'Rabbi, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶ Jesus said to him, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Parent except through my way. ⁷ If you know my way, you will know my Parent's way also. From now on you do know the Parent's way and have seen the Parent's way.'"

— *John 14.5-7*

“Thomas, the one who will later demand proof of Jesus’ resurrection by actually seeing and touching his wounds, here exclaims that he does not know the way that Jesus just said he did. The problem is that he doesn’t understand what Jesus meant by these words, but interpreted them in the only way that made sense to him. Are we not all Thomases? We see only what we understand based on our own experiences, reasonings, intuitions, and imaginations.

Jesus had delved these realms deeper and broader than most of us, and he was able to speak to truths that few others understand. Yet, notice that he claims that we already know the way. How is that? Because he himself has revealed the way by his teachings and practices of life. Like most people of his day, Jesus believed that spirits lived in most everything we say and do. If we look to his words and his actions, we can discern what spirit he himself had. And when we emulate that spirit, then we, too, can have that spirit live in us.

It is not Jesus himself the person, but his spirit, that he is declaring as “the way and the truth and the life.” The spirit of compassion, revealed in most everything he said and did, is the same spirit that can live in each of us. We simply need to look at how it was revealed in him, and then go and do likewise – just as he told us to do.

When we try to limit the way, truth, and life as representing only one person, we miss Jesus’ entire point. That way, truth, and life is a spirit that is pervasive throughout all of creation. It is something we can each latch on to and cultivate within our own being. It is what we can reveal by our loving actions, works of justice, and practices of peace.

These virtues and values are the same ones by which we characterize God. If we want to be closer to God, then we need to get closer to these virtues and values. No one gets close to God without inculcating and living by these virtues and values. And inasmuch as Jesus himself revealed these in his own life, his way, which is one with God’s way, is the way in which we all need to follow in order to know who God really is. We know God by becoming like God in our revealed virtues and values. God becomes our Parent, even as God was Jesus’ parent. Wherever we see the virtues and values of God revealed, no matter in whom they are manifested, we become witnesses to the way of God.”

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/3/2023*

“Philip said to him, ‘Rabbi, show us the Parent’s way, and we will be satisfied.’⁹ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know my way? Whoever has seen my way has seen the Parent’s way. How can you say, “Show us the Parent’s way?”¹⁰ Do you not trust that I am in the Parent and the Parent is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the Parent who dwells in me does the Parent’s works.¹¹ Trust me that I am in the Parent and the Parent is in me, but if you do not, then trust because of the works themselves.”

— *John 14.8-11*

“If someone living today told you that their way was the way of God, would you believe them? Probably not. And likely, you might even think they were crazy. Why is that? Well, it could be that their behavior doesn’t seem to accord with the behavior we’d expect of God. If they lie, steal, cheat, injure, kill, abuse, or in any other way disrespect or violate others, then it would be clear that their way is not the way of God.

But let us suppose that they don’t do any of these things, but instead show love, compassion, justice, peaceableness, gentleness, tenderness, kindness, patience, and good will towards everyone and everything. Would we then say their way is the way of God?

Probably not then either, even though we may be wrong in our estimation. And that is because many Christians consider it to be a heresy to believe that they can be as good as God. It goes against our cultural and religious assumptions that humility means we should look down on ourselves in comparison to God, to see ourselves as inferior and God as superior.

But was this the view of Jesus? Did he see equality of goodness with God something that we could achieve or not? There are actually good arguments to show that he believed equality with God, morally, ethically, and spiritually, were possible. He told us to be perfect, even as God is perfect. Sometimes that is translated as being as compassionate as God is compassionate. In either case, it assumes we can be equals to God in these ways.

That may sound odd to many people who have been the recipients of the view that has disparaged the human condition since the Middle Ages; but this disparaging view was not familiar to Jesus and the people of his time. We were considered to be made in the image of God, which meant we could be as God is with regard to our virtues and values – if only if that is what we perpetually chose to do, and to cultivate into our own characters.

Rather than take Jesus at his own words as attributed to him by John, we have interpreted these words in a way in which we don't actually listen to Jesus' implication that we can live in the same abode of God and live by God's way and Jesus' way, but that Jesus was only speaking these words about himself, and that we should see Jesus as equivalent to God, but never ourselves. The text clearly states otherwise, but our own assumptions have led us to believe that what is divine or sacred is not something that we can ever attain, but that it is reserved only for God.

It is interesting that mystical traditions in the three Abrahamic faiths assume that we can be one with God, contra the popular opinions that we cannot. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all have mystical traditions that tell us we can be united with God, not only in an esoteric way, but also in the virtues and values we develop over time with repeated practices of faithfulness. John's gospel has been argued to be within this mystical tradition, and as such invites us to reconsider our own presuppositions about our relationship to God and our own capabilities through the grace and spirit of God living through us.

Jesus tells us that if we can't agree with him because of our assumptions, that we should look to the works of a person to see if they are of God or not. Which carries greater weight for us: the beliefs we have about our humanity based on our religious and cultural assumptions, or the works of goodness we see revealed in Jesus and others who put love first in their lives? Which did Jesus tell us that we should focus on?

How would changing your assumptions about moral equality with God change how you look at life and what you might be able to achieve? How would it affect how you think of what it means to be faithful to God? How might it change your own practices and lifestyle?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/3/2023*

"Very truly, I tell you, the one who trusts in my way will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Parent."

— *John 14.12*

"It is sad that "pistis" (Gk.) translated here as 'trusts' is often translated as 'believes.' In English in our time, to believe something merely requires a cognitive assent that it seems true. It requires little effort, and perhaps no risk in believing something to be true. Believing something may not affect how you live your life whatsoever. This is not what "pistis" means; a word that even goes beyond our English word trust. Trust means we not only believe something, but that we are willing to act on what we believe – even at great risk to ourselves.

I recall a professor of mine, Herb Cassell, comparing the difference between belief and trust with a story of a man who was intent on tightrope walking across Niagara Falls with someone on his back. Because he had achieved many incredible tightrope feats in his career, many people believed that he could also do this one across Niagara Falls. However, the difference with belief and trust is the difference between supposing that he could actually do it (i.e., belief) versus being the volunteer to get on his back (i.e., trust).

It is easy to believe, but much more difficult to trust. Pistis assumes a level of trust that involves our whole being in the project. With pistis, we are willing to risk much because it is so tied to our core values. Jesus was willing to die on the cross because of his pistis in God's values. Pistis governs our life choices. It is what we have to do, out of integrity, because we actually live by our values rather than merely asserting them.

To trust in Jesus' way means to live as he lived; by the same virtues and values. It means to reorient life in a way in which those values govern our thoughts, emotions, attitudes, choices, actions, practices, and every other behavior. When we make this whole-being commitment to Christ's ways, it changes everything. And because it does, it means we can do works equal or greater to those in which Jesus himself did. We can show the same or greater compassion, sense of justice, penchant for peace, etc., that he himself did.

Of course, we can't do this if we keep our same values as now, for that is merely a course in perhaps thinking differently but not being different. But when we let the Spirit that was in him become our own spirit, then our lives are transformed. New things are possible because we have reoriented our entire lives to conform with these greater values and virtues.

Are we believers, or trusters? In Jesus' way, or our own?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/3/2023*

"If you are willing to abandon your principles for convenience or social acceptability, they are not your principles. They are your costume."

— *Nitya Prakash*

"I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Parent may be honored in the Child. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

— *John 14.13-14*

"To ask something in Jesus' name is not merely to ask for it and add on the words, 'in Jesus' name.' That is a modern misconstrual of what it meant at that time to do something in someone's name. To do something in someone name means to do something in accordance with the same character and spirit by which that person's name represents. To do something in God's name, for example, would mean to do it in accordance with all of the virtues we associate as being characteristic of God. The same is true of doing something in Jesus' name. It means we have to do it in a way that is not only compatible and consistent with Jesus' own virtues and values, but that accords with the very character and spirit of Jesus himself.

Thus, to ask for a sports car, a beautiful house, wealth, power, prestige, or most of what many people ask for today would not be in accordance with Jesus' spirit even if we add the words, 'in Jesus' name.' Indeed, that would be considered blasphemy to do, just as it is idolatry to use God's name in vain – which was never about cursing, but was rather about using God's name to condone something God would never condone (e.g., injustice, genocide, torture, war, violence, hatred, discrimination, etc.).

This was Jesus' way of saying that God won't give you whatever you want, but at most will give you what accords with God's own way. And since Jesus lived by God's way, if we follow in Jesus' way, then we will, in effect, follow God's way. Consequently, to "ask" something in someone's name is not merely to make a petition to the person in whose name you are using. Rather, it is averring that you actually live by that person's virtues and values, and that your life itself is a representation of asking for what that person would ask for.

When we ask something in Jesus' name, therefore, it must accord with doing what is best for others, not simply ourselves. It has to evidence magnanimity, beneficence, and altruism of the highest order. It cannot be done out of selfish ambitions, or any degree of self-centeredness. It has to be done for the

greater good, or for the sake of the virtue or value by which it is being done. Thus, we don't love others because they may love us in return; rather we love them unconditionally and with no expectation of reciprocity because it is simply the right thing to do. We don't give justice to someone because we think they may eventually be in a position to give us justice in return, but because being just is good in itself – regardless of the consequences to ourselves. We don't promote peace because we don't want to experience violence and antagonism in our own lives, we do so because peace is to be cherished for its own sake in that all people will then be blessed by peace. This was how Jesus acted. These were his motivations. To do something in his name is to act accordingly, and with the same motivations.

We should never ask something in Jesus' name in which Jesus would never consent to based on his own virtues and values. Rather, we need to live by Jesus' virtues and values so that our very lives exemplify that we have already asked and received the fruits of his own spirit."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/3/2023*