

Show Us The Father

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Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter (John 14:1-12)
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The Fifth Sunday of Easter. More “dwelling”. Key word for today, “dwell”. More dwelling in the resurrection life that was opened up for us on Easter Sunday. More accompanying the one who was able to inhabit the toxicity of death without fear, which is what the gift of eternal life is about. We have seen on different Sundays different dimensions, different pushings of the envelope, as to what that might mean.

Last Sunday we looked at what it might mean that Jesus was Shepherd, what it looked like that we need not fear death and its traps, sacrificial order, people out to get us. We could trust and relax, knowing that we would be cared for, that no one would snatch us out of the Father’s hand.

And today, that’s taken further. What’s being opened up for us is the splendour and the spaciousness of God. It’s difficult for us to imagine. Normally when we hear phrases like: “Believe in God, believe in me”; “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”; we hear this as a narrowing. “You must believe or you go to hell”; and, “I am the way, the truth and the life, so all the other ones are wrong.” Right? Heard that before?

It’s exactly the reverse of what Jesus is talking about. Exactly the reverse. Let’s try and hear those words from exactly the reverse perspective. Let’s hear those words from the perspective of one who is inhabiting death non-toxically, so as to make it available for us to live without the fear of death. So it’s not a bully from above saying “Believe, believe”, but someone from beneath saying, “Please believe. I’m trying to open up to you the possibility of goodness so that you can relax. You don’t need to be frightened. This is not an attempt to get you. There’s going to be far more space for you, and all your weirdness and wonderfulness.”

God’s not out to get you. He’s not trying to dragoon you into shape. He wants to enjoy you, to dwell with you. So he’s got many mansions, many dwelling places. He’s going to turn you into those dwelling places. Relax.

Don't be paranoid. And don't think he's out to get you. I'm going to show you that, by inhabiting death. You see, whenever in John's gospel Jesus says: "I must go"; or "Where I am going", this is Johannean code for: "I am going to death. I am going to inhabit death in such a way that it will be an empty trophy, and you will start to see the love, the generosity, the self-giving that went into making that available, so that you need no longer to be frightened of it. That's because I'm not here to do a magic trick. I'm not here to wave a magic wand so as to "save" you. I'm here because the Father, the Creator, wants to get through to you to involve you in being part of creation from within. He knows that you're so frightened of dying that you are refusing to take part. So actually, by my inhabiting death for you, the possibility is going to be opened up for you no longer to be frightened; and because of that, to dare to start to create things, and to do even greater works than the ones I have done, because the Creator will be able to work through you, opening up new things that none of you have been able to imagine yet. Many mansions that we don't know about."

See what I mean? It's a slightly different approach. It's someone begging you to relax, begging you to relax, to believe that there is space, that you needn't be frightened, needn't narrow anything down.

Of course we read, in the light of Easter, a discussion that took place before Easter. So actually the gospel gives us two interjections, by Thomas and by Philip. First of all, Thomas says:

We don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?
(John 14:5)

because Thomas still has the notion of God who is somewhere "out there", and there needing to be a moral path to a God who is "out there". Jesus says, "No. I am the way, the truth and the life. Actually all that is being done for you. I'm making all that available by inhabiting death. It's my human life. There's a pattern of this human life. There's no there, there. This is it."

And Philip, showing that it's difficult to get this point says "For Lord's sake, do stop going on about this stuff about yourself.

Just show us the father and we'll be satisfied." (John 14:8)

And Jesus has to say "Ah Philip, haven't you got it yet? How long have I been with you? And you haven't seen. The only image of the Father is not

something out there, not something under there, not something back there. The only image of the Father is me going to my death. You want to know what the Father looks like. It looks like the Creator coming in to the world as someone who's prepared to be crucified, so as to inhabit death, so as to enable his creatures to be unfrightened, so that they can start to take part in his creation. That's what the Father looks like. The only image you have of the Father is this life, this living out which I am doing for you. It's the giving up to death that shows that it's the Creator. Who but the Creator could nullify death, could inhabit death in such a way that I'll come again, as he promises the gift of the Spirit? I'll come again, so that you can do the same."

You see, we're dwelling in the time between Easter, when he's showing what he's done, and the gift of the Spirit, when we're going to become ourselves what he's been doing, when we're going to be allowed to dwell peacefully in this space without being frightened. We're going to be able to start to become flexible, creative imitations of what he's up to. We're going to start to be able to create crazy mansions, unimagined dwelling places, more kitsch than you can imagine. Yes, not a narrowing down, an explosion of different possibilities, because we're no longer narrowed down and frightened, we're no longer run by scarcity, the sense that everything's running down so I'd better protect. While we think *that*, we have a picture of someone who's out to get us, in a way like a headmaster wanting to rap us on the knuckles saying, "Get in to *that* way". But when there's an abundance, the way *is* the possibility. It's the opening out. And the belief is the relaxing, which enables the possibility to happen. Jesus is doing something very, very difficult for any of us to grasp in this passage if we're stuck with a tri-theistic picture of God, which is basically God as three blokes: One who does something; One who does something; and One who does something. It's not what the word "person" means in Trinitarian theology. In terms of modern notions of a centre of consciousness, of course, it's not even accurate to talk about a centre of consciousness in God; but we're talking about *one* of them, not three.

Jesus reveals what the Father is. Jesus as a human being is the manifestation of the Father. There's no Father behind him. You want to see the Father. The person, the human person Jesus, giving himself up to death, being prepared to inhabit death, that is who the Father is. If you like, it's the oomph, the oomph behind what he is. But it's not another centre of consciousness behind him. That's tri-theism. Trinitarian monotheism is, if you like, the depth of what the person Jesus of Nazareth does in our midst, and what enables us to dwell in him, in the possibilities which he opens up for being creative, for not being frightened. And you

begin to see a way in which we might talk about him as the way, the truth and the life, that's making something available for people, rather than shutting possibilities down.

For you see how easy it is for us to turn this in to yet another ideology, and try to dragoon people in to a narrow space, where there's only one mansion in heaven and it's a very dull one. And there's only one way to it, which is Jesus as an idea. And you say "No. Jesus is not an idea. He's a living act of self donation, dwelling unfrightenedly in the midst of death. And because of that, teaching us to relax about our own limitations, our own weaknesses, our own hurts, relax enough about them so that we can start to think: what would it be fun to do, how can I shepherd the sheep, how can I create new space for people? What's it going to be like?

Let's go through the Ikea catalogue. What! An even bigger than Ikea catalogue. Let's empty out Home Depot in imagination of what the spaces to inhabit could be like. And we'll be able to do that safely, for as long as we're not grasping on to something which we think could be taken away from us. We'll be able to inhabit it safely, because you're given the capacity to do the works of the Father, who is the Creator, who knows not death.

Do you see how we're being nudged in to preparation for receiving the Holy Spirit? In a couple of weeks' time it'll be Pentecost. And here the Holy Spirit will come down upon you and you will find new ways of creating mansions. You will find yourself involved, becoming new Christs, building new mansions, so that you'll actually be able to say what it says here:

Whatever you ask for in my name I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name I will do it.
(John 14:13)

"And because you will be becoming me it will be me who's doing it. You will be me. I'm going to take the risk of accompanying you to Home Depot and Ikea. I'm going to undergo your taste. Shock, horror! I'm going to run the risk of seeing what it is that we can do together." And it will be the Creator who will be doing this within us, because he's so keen to get across that he can be trusted. He's trying to nudge you from underneath, saying: "Please, please believe me. You'll have so much more fun if you do."

So let's dwell in this space, and long for the great house clearing and house creation that will come in a couple of weeks' time, to push the envelope even further, and empower us to start to become that which we've been shown signs of, in this dwelling during these weeks of Easter.

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