

Double Bypass

Shepherd's Grace Church

May 18, 2014

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?³ And if 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.

⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." ⁸Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

(John 14: 1-14) (also read Acts 7: 55-60)

Stephen was new to the ministry. He had recently graduated to the position. He was excited to begin his work. He had been trained to serve and believed he was ready. As he began to share, he was recognized as one who was right for the job. It did not matter that he was younger than the rest. It did not matter that he did not have as many years of experience or that he had not personally known Jesus. What mattered was that the widows and the orphans were now being taken care of because Stephan was good at what he did!

Today is a day on which we recognize our graduates from high school and those being promoted to their next big school assignments. In the world in which we live today, graduates are often excused in new assignments or in their next level of learning as being new to the work. They are given a pass so they can be brought up to speed. Expectations for them are lowered and they are allowed to do less than

others who have been at the job awhile longer. As we recognize our graduates today, I wonder how they feel knowing expectations are lowered for them? Are they willing to accept less of themselves or do they reject the stereotypes that suggest they need a learning curve. Do they need time to get acclimated or are they, like Stephen, ready for the job?

This question is the point at which Luke's account of the Apostles meets John's desire to instruct. Both wonder today about the readiness of disciples. Both challenge our imagination about all disciples are ready to do. Both call into question the credentials of those who wish to step forward and answer the call to serve that is placed before them!

That question of credentials is an interesting one isn't it. We are not told what Stephan's credentials are. He is filled with the Holy Spirit, but how did that happen? What requirements has he met to be recognized as one who has been filled? What requirements have any of us met?

Earlier this week, I saw a post on facebook. It was a picture of one of the youth from Shepherd's Grace sitting in a "new to the person" car! This person was excited and bubbly and ready to go out into the world to drive amongst others who were ready to drive. The person was growing up and was eager to step into new privileges. When I saw the picture I thought, "How can it be that this one is ready to drive?" It seems like only yesterday that the person was attending Vacation Bible School. It seemed like such a short time ago that the person was entering middle school. It couldn't have been more than an hour or two since the person was part of our youth group! How could the person be ready...how could the person possibly be old enough and trained enough to take on the responsibility for operating a motor vehicle?

I was shocked and stunned so I called the person's mother. We laughed for a minute about the photo and the car and I asked about the person's training. The mother assured me that the person had completed drivers education, that the person had demonstrated responsibility as a driver and that she was quite confident in the person's judgment and responsibility. I felt better after that conversation and was delighted to hear that the mom had such a high opinion of her child's ability to assume such an adult activity! Still, I am glad that our drivers have to prove their credentials when asked. They have to show their license when stopped by officials and they have their credentials available when parents ask for them before allowing their sons and daughters in the car with them!

As I thought about the credential required for a person of 14 to drive a car, I wondered about the credentials of others. We congratulated our graduates yesterday and we watched them walk across the

stage and receive what others said was their diploma. Do we really know that they got their diplomas? Could the exercise we witnessed have been an elaborate hoax? In service, I asked the graduates if they actually had their diplomas with them. They did not! I asked then how we could believe them that they were high school graduates. They replied that we could check their status with their parents who are by and large, credible and trustworthy people. They also suggested that we could contact the high school to verify their credentials. Our assumption then would be that because the school is a legitimate source of confirmation, we should be willing to take the word of the that authority. If we cannot believe the authority, we can request a transcript and see the works themselves. Because we have a number of sources to confirm the credentials of our high school graduates, we can accept their claim to validity! What of others who claim credentials however?

Today, Jesus claims to be a heart surgeon! He does! In the first verse of the passage I shared with you this morning, he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled!" We can wonder what credentials Jesus has earned to be able to give this kind of advice. Has he gone to Medical school? Certainly in Luke's gospel there is some forensic evidence of Jesus medical prowess, but there is no mention in any of the gospels or anywhere else in scripture of Jesus attending medical school. How then can we trust his advice about our hearts?

It occurs to me that just as with our new high school graduates, many other graduates do not have to present credentials! Those of you who have graduated from college with a specialty field. Do you have a copy of your diploma with you right now? Do you have anything even in your house or place of work that will conclusively demonstrate your credibility in the field in which you claim to be an expert? Perhaps, more importantly, does the person in which you place your trust for your medical care have a credential with them?

How many of us, when we go to a doctor of surgery check on the credentials of the surgeon to whom we go? When you enter your doctor's office do you say to them, show me your medical school transcript? Do you question them about the college they attended? Do you scrutinize the classes they took to be sure they are qualified to perform the kind of medical work on you that you seek? Some people do, to be sure, but most of us come to surgeons and specialists by way of referral. The doctor from whom we seek help has been mentioned by our family doctor, our general practitioner, or by a friend or relative. We do not ask for the credentials of the surgeon because we trust the person making the referral.

Last summer, when I had my knee surgery, the doctor who had been trying unsuccessfully to treat my problem for weeks referred me to a person he had a great deal of confidence in. I walked into that surgeon's office with confidence not from knowing the surgeon but from knowing the person who referred the surgeon! I did not ask for credentials but rather, trusted the one to whom I had been referred!

Jesus comes to us today via referral! We were not with him when he walked on the earth and God who became man. We did not personally witness his turning water into wine. We did not seem him heal the lame or cure the blind! We could not recount his conversation with the woman at the well or listen to Him as he recounted scripture and salvation to Nicodemus in the dark. All we have to commend Jesus is a referral!

When he says to us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," we must decide based on the trustworthiness of our referral whether we are going to trust him. Today, we need to examine the referral. Jesus says, believe me. Believe God also. I am going to prepare a place for you and I will return for you and will heal your hearts forever! Then he says to those to whom he is speaking directly, "you know how and where I am going to do it." You can schedule your appointment and trust that I will keep it!

Thomas, one of the more inquisitive students asks the question we all want an answer to. "Lord, we do not know where you are going to prepare this place for us. How can we even begin to know how to get there?" Jesus gives the response that John passes along to all of us. It is a prescription for salvation that seems simple enough but like all prescriptions, it must be taken with caution! We must follow the directions for that which we are about to receive.

The prescription is Jesus himself! "I am the way," he says. "I am the truth and the life!" The problem is the dosage! There are many who use this prescription as a cure-all and as a result, they overdose on it because they take it in ways that it is not intended. Many want to take this prescription and claim that it is the cure-all for every quest for salvation. "All you have to do is know Jesus!" they say. If you know him you will find salvation through him.

At this point, we need to have the graduate degrees that have been conferred upon us to understand the fullness of his message. Jesus has just told his disciples that he will be betrayed.(John 13) and that he will be denied. The one who will betray him, Judas, knows him. The one who will deny him, Peter, knows him! Knowledge is not enough. Many who would seek salvation often miss it by about 12 inches. That is the distance between the heart and the head! People who believe that to know Jesus is to

achieve salvation and who continue to convict others because they believe in different ways or are still searching for the “truth” can cause great stumbling blocks.

Knowing Jesus is simply not enough. Jesus wants us to have a relationship with Him! Judas knew him and still betrayed him because he rejected the mission that Jesus was given. In John 6, Jesus said his mission was to do the will of God and that will is to lose none of the all that is created! Judas wanted Jesus to sacrifice this mission for the salvation of only some. Jesus rejected that notion, refused the offer of kingship and responded instead to the will of God! Those willing to accept graduation from the school of Jesus understand that this decision opens the way for all people, for all of creation to be completed in the perfection to which God originally intends!

The way to the place where Jesus is going is not just to know Jesus, but to have a relationship with Him and to build that relationship by inviting and including all people in God’s plan for salvation! None are to be left out! None are to be excluded. John 14: 6 is not to be a barrier but instead a path for all to see the glory of God and respond to it willingly and without reservation. The whole phrase must be read, “ I am the way, the truth, and the life!” The way to the place Jesus speaks of is not a hard nosed, hard headed approach to salvation. Instead, it is an investigation worthy of a graduate. It requires a pursuit of the truth to the very end. It requires weighing the evidence and drawing a conclusion. In chapter 18, Pilate asks Jesus, “What is truth?”

Truth is an absolute. It is beyond a mathematical certainty! It can be tested and tried and turned over and over again without different results! Gravity is truth. Light and darkness are truth. When examined, they demonstrate the same properties consistently, time and time again. They are accepted by all as universal! Jesus says, “believe in me.” To do this, we must see consistency in Jesus that meets the standards of truth we come to expect. Jesus is not asking us to believe in only part of Him. He is asking that we believe in the whole! Is he the “word of God,” with God from the beginning? Is He the author of creation? Is He the word made flesh who came to walk among us filled with grace as the “Father’s only Son?” There must be no doubt or we cannot accept the truth!

“I AM” walks among us and demonstrates the truth of God’s love for us. He does this by signs but by more! He does this by His willingness to subject Himself to the same temptations, trials and sufferings that we endure and invites us to watch. The disciples who were at the meal with him in chapters 13-17 listen to him and have the opportunity to learn his “truth.” They come to know it through questions and satisfactory answers. Like gravity, they test it to the point where they can trust it! Later, they will teach that truth but for now they struggle just as we do to believe! I suspect they have the same questions we

have! "How could this man prepare a place for us?" The question we have for ourselves is, "How can we believe in Him?"

In Chapter 11 of John's gospel, Thomas said, "Come, let us also go with him (to Bethany where the Jews are looking to stone him) so that we also may die with him." The disciples not only examined the answers he gave to the questions they have, but also the way in which He practiced what he preached. They witnessed his willingness to put himself in jeopardy for those whom He loved. Under threat of death by stoning, Jesus went to Bethany to demonstrate His love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus! He was willing to lay down His life for them! Later in the gospel in Chapter 15, Jesus said, "There is no greater love than this; to lay down one's life for a friend!" Through a developing relationship with Jesus, the disciples learned that he was willing to not only speak the truth but to live the truth and even to die for it!

When Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," he does not exclude others! Instead he welcomes all to him, to enter into a relationship with him, to listen to his teaching and examine the truth of it. He invites us all to ask if we are not all children of God; creation of incredible worth, creation worth saving and restoring, creation worth redeeming so that it might never be lost! He invites us all to know through his teaching that there is a precise and perfect plan that was put in place even before the beginning of time for our redemption! In the beginning, God determined that not one of His creation should be lost without God's effort to find and reclaim them! That plan required someone to show creation the fullness of God's love; to walk among them and live in their presence demonstrating God's grace and hope for them. The plan also included that same one to redeem them, to trade sinlessness for sin so that they might be made worthy to stand in God's presence.

The WAY that could happen was through relationship and not rejection; relationship in the truth that "God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whosoever believed in Him should not perish but have eternal life," and to remind those who were created that the Son did not come into the world to judge the world but to "redeem the world." The WAY comes through the TRUTH! The TRUTH invites examination and when agreed upon, commitment to. We do not jump out of buildings because we know we will fall and be hurt or killed. In the same way, we do not reject God's forgiveness because to do so means we will continue to be hurt or separated from God in eternal life! The TRUTH comes into the world so that we may know God's love for us. The TRUTH exists as the WAY so that we might have a relationship with God.

LIFE lives out the WAY and the TRUTH. Jesus teaches his disciples and then lays down His life for them as a way to demonstrate the fullness of God's love! The disciples witness all of this. They watch as the deaf hear, the blind see, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news preached to them. Even as they see these examples of the TRUTH, they still have questions. It is not until they witness the LIFE laid down willingly as an affirmation of the TRUTH that they come to realize God's plan to save the entire world through this one man!

LIFE imitates the art of love! LIFE walks daily toward something that is unknown and unseen because LIFE is precious and valued and to be preserved. LIFE is light and the light has come into the darkness but the darkness could not overcome it! (John 1) The WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE are not a prescription given by a doctor to be taken as a magic cure for sinfulness. They are instead a therapy intended as an eternal process of healing that leads us past the blockage in our hearts. If Jesus is able to forgive those who would attempt to steal, kill and destroy (John 10: 10) so that he can bypass their bad connections to the heart of God, how much more should His disciples have bypass surgery so we can be in relationship not only with Him but with each other! (John 13)

Today, Jesus invites his disciples not only to bypass one notion, the notion of judgment by God for all their indiscretions but He also invites us to have a second bypass. He invites us to not only receive God's forgiveness but to forgive others even as God has forgiven us. LIFE is about relationships. Relationships are not exclusive but inclusive. God desires relationships with all of God's creation! He does not exclude those whom we think are unworthy. He does not exclude those whom we think are unwise! God knows the condition of each one's heart and God alone can determine the nature of the relationship God will have. It is not up to us to exclude. When we try to use the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE to reject the relationships others are seeking with God, we are discounting the power of God to reveal Godself to them. The TRUTH is that if God can not reveal Godself to them, neither can God reveal Godself to us!

Stephen understood this. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he set about to do the work God called him to. He set about to feed the hungry, to shelter the poor, to care for children and orphans. As he did this, complaints to the disciples from those neglected before ceased and the disciples could do the work God had most completely called them to! They were able to effectively communicate the Word of God to the people so they could be restored to a relationship free from sin and judgment!

The world, however could not believe the work Stephen was doing. He was helping more, even than Jesus. He was doing even greater works because he believed in the power of the one whom God had

sent to show the way in a world that did not want to know the way! Stephen had graduated from the school of discipleship and had conferred upon him all the rights and responsibilities of his degree! One of the things we do not like to hear is that sometimes that responsibility requires of us the same thing it required of Jesus. It requires our LIFE! We must be willing to offer the greatest gift in order to be able to receive the same gift in return. Those who value their lives in this world will lose them. Those willing to give up their lives will have them saved even up to eternal life. Graduates of the school of discipleship know this!

Some of us came here today by way of the bypass around the city. I love the bypass! It lets me miss all the stoplights of downtown. It lets me get past all the things that slow me down and it allows me to get here sooner! I love to be here, in this place sharing the word with my friends and to be here sooner is a good thing! Some, however do not take the bypass. They come by another way. They come the way that they can see and navigate. They pass by other obstacles in order to be here in this place where they too can share the word! This double bypass allows us to be in relationship with one another at exactly the right time and in exactly the right place. God invites us this morning to be in that relationship! He calls us all! He calls us to do even greater things! He invites us to go out into the world and "in the name of Jesus" invite all to know the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE not as judgment but as relationship that is lived in the name of love! Amen!