

May 5, 2024

Lesson 10: The Way, The Truth, The Life

Scripture: John 14: 1-14

Context:

Today we continue our spring curriculum, “Encounters in Prayer and Love,” where we look at how the spiritual discipline of prayer illuminates God’s presence in our lives. Today we continue our unit titled “Empowering Spirit,” as we examine how Jesus and the Holy Spirit led people to focus on spreading the gospel to languages where others could understand the gift of faith and grace. Today’s lesson will be to investigate how an encounter with Jesus the Son makes possible a new experience of God the Father.

Today’s scripture lesson comes from the gospel of John. The text focuses on Jesus and his last evening with his disciples. Before Jesus is arrested and put on trial, he gives his disciples instruction as well as a prayer over them. Part of Jesus’ counsel includes an explanation of his own identity and how this should relate to their full experience of God.

Jesus begins part of his speech to them with the counsel, “let your hearts not be troubled.”¹ Jesus goes on to explain he is going on a journey before them leading the way to the Father. When his disciple Thomas asks him the way, Jesus emphasizes how everything comes through him which he has said before: he is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus utilizes what is known as the “I am” statements. These statements reflect to Yahweh revealing God’s name in Exodus when God calls out to Moses saying, “I am who I am.”² As Jesus makes this statement, he is opening the door to theology his disciples would have known.

Jesus is making more explicit the link between the Father and him. While he has done so throughout the gospel of John, these statements move it even further. The believers of Jesus have two ways they may understand how Jesus functions. They may accept his word about the intimate Father-Son relation or be moved by the testimony of Jesus’ works (v.11).³ The latter recognition comes after Jesus is addressed by the disciple Philip who wants to see the Father directly. Jesus makes it clear this is not an option as this has been Jesus’ very mission: to show the disciples God and what God can do.

Jesus closes the dialogue on the connection with the Father-Son relationship by emphasizing how the true power will come with those who believe these things even though they have not even seen him. As Jesus goes to the Father, there are still opportunities to go forth and do things which point to the Spirit’s action in the world. Jesus is emphasizing how his presence with the disciples and his ministry on earth has opened up a new understanding about the Father and the gift of faith. The Triune God is glorified as Jesus helps humanity to connect all the dots together.

¹ John 14:1, NRSV.

² Exodus 3:14, NRSV.

³ Sloyan, Gerard. “John.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009.), 180.

Application

As I have had the privilege to teach classes on the introduction of the Old Testament at Huntingdon College, one of the first questions I receive is, “Why should we learn the Old Testament, especially when the New Testament is where Jesus comes in?” It is clear there is a portion of those who think everything you think you need to know comes from the New Testament as the Old Testament is irrelevant and not as poignant. Yet I tell those students one cannot understand God unless you begin at the beginning. All of the Bible is important, and Jesus only emphasizes more of who God is if you have both testaments for the story of God to come together.

We return to the lines Jesus gives in the gospel of John to emphasize this point: I am the way, the truth, and the life. The phrase “I am” was the phrase God used to speak to Moses about his identity. Jesus is coming to remind humanity of how past, present, and future work together. God is always in the detailing weaving everything together and giving a fuller understanding of faith and life.

The reason Jesus is so important to us is because of the belief of the Incarnation, or God in the flesh, which is a radical concept. Throughout the gospels, we see God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit working in tandem to move and stir humanity. We begin to see how God is constantly seeking new ways to speak to humanity, to help us realize the good news and see the grace and new life which is there.

One of the best analogies I can think of understanding the Father-Son dynamic is thinking of how we interact with little ones. Whether we have children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or friends’ of children, we have had to all find ways to interact with little ones. Most of the time, it can be fun as you use imagination and play to connect with them. You get on “their level” so to speak, finding the ways you can engage with them. You do have to be the adult occasionally saying “we use our inside voice” here and perhaps give clear boundaries. Yet the best occasions come when you play with them and this how they learn how to respond to you and to others.

The Johannine author is big on helping us to understand how Jesus is often like the bigger kid who comes to be with the smaller ones. There is a direct tie of the bigger kid to the adult and yet the mission is the same: to help the younger ones bloom and grow. The younger ones are to see the gifts of those who are older and to also feel the protection and the warmth which comes from those who are over them.

For those of us in the Christian faith, there is beauty in how Jesus came to be with humanity because of how God loves us. Atonement and resurrection are indeed important and yet there is also the gift of how God wanted to just walk and breath among humanity. It is much like when we get on the floor and play with little ones. We do not have to have a specified reason or formula to do; they just appreciate our undivided time and energy coming to them. God does the same with us in the Incarnation.

For Jesus’ last night with his disciples, there was so much out of his control. Yet the one thing he did possess was the ability to be with them to explain his identity and then to relate what was expected of them. The mission Jesus was on was part of God’s larger narrative to help humanity wake up to new life given unto us. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had a mission for humanity to see God is not absent or distant. Everywhere you go, God is there and God wants to be in relationship with humanity.

So the next time you play with little ones, think about your words and your actions. What do you want them to know or understand about you, about themselves? And then think of the

Lord God who made the entire universe and who came to earth because of how much Jesus loves us. We see the power of presence and how God gives us the gifts to be in relation with God and with all those around us.

How do Jesus' words bring you comfort? Why do you think it is so important to talk about the Triune God? How would you describe the Trinity to someone new to the faith? Where have encounters with Jesus changed how you describe God? Why do you think Jesus is so intentional with making ties to God the Father?

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