

**Sermon preached by Pastor Robert Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, April 20, 2008**

**JESUS: THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE**

**John 14:1-7**

Our church is faced with painful and difficult circumstances these days, isn't it? Several of you experienced a death in your family in the past few weeks. Some of you are in tough battles against cancer or heart disease or some other problem. Some have had trouble finding a job or have been laid off. We are all disappointed with the problems in Pastor Smith's recovery from surgery. So we have a lot of questions about suffering and those hard circumstances that are behind our hearts being troubled.

A few years ago, Bobby McFerrin came out with a catchy little song called "Don't Worry, Be Happy!" It has simple advice about how to handle problems. One of the stanzas goes like this:

There is this little song I wrote  
I hope you learn it note for note  
Like good little children  
Don't worry, be happy  
Listen to what I say  
In your life expect some trouble  
But when you worry you make it double  
Don't worry, be happy  
Don't worry, don't do it, be happy  
Put a smile on your face  
Don't bring everybody down like this  
Don't worry, it will soon pass  
Whatever it is don't worry, be happy

That sounds nice, but a little simplistic. How do we go about not worrying? Do we just smile at our problems until they go away? Does it work? This morning, I want to talk about a better way to handle worry. Words from John 14 that Jesus gave 2,000 years ago to stressed-out, troubled disciples.

The place is the upper room. The scene is the Last Supper. Jesus had just finished celebrating the first communion with His disciples. And then, He dropped a number of bombshells on them: He revealed that He was going to be betrayed by one of the Twelve; He told them that Peter, regarded as the ringleader of the disciples, would deny him; and then He gave the worst news of all: He was going to leave them.

They did not understand that Jesus came to this earth with the express purpose of going to the cross, dying for the sin of the world, and then rising from the dead. That was not yet clear to them. They thought He was going to establish an earthly kingdom. When He said, "I'm going to leave you," it freaked them out. These are men who had left everything to follow Jesus; now He

is telling them that He is about to leave them. They are filled with apprehension. What Jesus meant by troubled hearts is that they were confused, perplexed, ashamed. Their minds held a medley of emotions.

And Jesus commands, “Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” He's saying to the disciples . . . and to us: When it seems like your world is falling apart and problems seem like they will overtake you, stop worrying and trust in Him. That's tough to do. Let's see how this passage can help us.

### **JESUS BRINGS US TO THE FATHER'S HOUSEHOLD**

The only remedy for a troubled and discouraged heart is a continuing trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ. These followers of Jesus would soon learn that real peace is rooted in His death and resurrection. The apostle Paul would write later in Romans 8:32, *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?*

When Jesus tells his disciples to no longer be troubled, He does so with a clear understanding of what His departure really meant – His crucifixion, His resurrection and His ascension to heaven. The disciples did not yet understand. But Jesus told them to trust in Him.

We trust in Him even when things are not very clear, when we don't understand our problems. How often do we find ourselves perplexed and distressed because we just cannot grasp why something is happening to us? When we don't understand why God allowed something into our lives, when we are scared about how things will turn out. That is usually when we worry, isn't it?

Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.* That means that sometimes – many times – we are not going to understand our circumstances and disappointments.

Our peace does not come from understanding our problems but from understanding our Lord.

With this in mind, the first thing I want you to notice is that we are to believe that Jesus brings us to the Father's household. He says: *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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.*

Here, these stressed-out disciples with troubled hearts are told that they will see a better day. They are told that they don't have to worry because someday they are to be welcomed into the Father's household – in fact, that is the reason for their troubles. Jesus went to the cross so that sinners like them – and you and me – could have a better day.

It is the same picture we see in the Parable of the Prodigal Son: A well-to-do man had two sons. The younger one asks for his inheritance and goes off, with money in his pocket, to a distant country to live it up. He squanders his wealth on wild living and ends up flat broke and starving. He comes home ashamed and empty-handed, expecting nothing from his dad except perhaps . . . a job as a field hand.

Gone was the wealth and privilege he had by being a part of his father's household. Living in the bunkhouse with the hired help is all that he could imagine.

But what does the father do? The old man was filled with compassion; he ran to his son. When the two met, the young man said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father doesn't turn him away – he welcomes him. He threw his arms around his son, gave him the best clothes and threw a party, saying: "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

That's what it means to be welcomed into our heavenly Father's household.

Now, this is only true for the person who has put their faith in Jesus Christ. I know that when I die, I will go be welcomed by the Father. That's not a boast. I'm not better than anyone in this room right now. I'm just one of those lost sons who was brought back to the Father. The same is true for each of you who trust Jesus. Because we have put our faith in Jesus, we know that when we die, we will go to heaven – there is a place being prepared for us.

This is a promise given to every person who has put their faith in Christ. When we die, we'll go immediately into the presence of the Lord. No matter what happens to you on this earth as a Christian, it pales when compared with this great hope. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says, *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

Let me illustrate this. There was a TV miniseries in the 1970s called *Roots*. The show caught the desperation and horrible plight of Africans who were captured and brought to America as slaves. The hero is a young man named Kunta Kinte and the story of *Roots* was about how his descendants would maintain their heritage over the course of American history, break free of slavery, and slowly (far too slowly!) be welcomed to this country as free people.

In one of the most dramatic scenes, Kunta is to be punished for trying to escape his captors. His shirt is ripped from his back and he is hung up to be whipped. The overseer comes out, proud and furious, and looks at the young man hanging up there by his wrists.

Trying to get Kunta to acknowledge his status by repeating his slave name, he says, "What's your name, boy?" The young man replies, "Kunta."

Smirking, the overseer commands another slave to whip him. Kunta takes one blow, a second, then a third.

Then, again, the overseer asked, "What's your name, boy?" Again, now weakly, he said, "Kunta."

After three more blows, and a lot more blood, Kunta whispered his slave name, “Toby.” And the overseer whirled about, proud, arrogant. “Louder! Let me hear it again. What's your name boy?”

Kunta whispered again, “Toby, master.”

Then an old slave named Fiddler, embraced and comforted his young friend. With the music in the background, Kunta slumps into the Fiddler’s lap, the old man began convulsing, and through his tears, cried out: “Dey's gonna be a better day. Dey's gonna be a better day.”

For every one of us who are troubled by life’s disappointments, there is gonna be a better day.

### **JESUS IS THE WAY TO THE FATHER’S HOUSEHOLD**

How do we know that there will be a better day? What guarantee do we have? In the midst of suffering and disappointment – when we feel like life is whipping us bloody and leaving its scars – how do we know that the Father’s welcome really waits for us? That’s what Thomas asked, “*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*”

How did Jesus answer him? Jesus said, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

This is another one of those “I am” sayings, when Jesus used the Greek expression “I am” to identify Himself as the “I Am,” the ancient Hebrew name Yahweh or Jehovah, the one we translate in the Old Testament as LORD.

Jesus used this expression to demonstrate to everyone who heard Him that He was God. We have been looking at this expression over the past few weeks: I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the gate for the sheep, I am the good shepherd. In a couple of weeks, we’ll conclude with I am the true vine. In each of these sayings, Jesus makes the compelling claim to be God in the flesh!

So here, all that is at stake with the promise of heaven depends on Jesus being who He says He is.

And when Jesus added “the Way and the Truth and the Life,” to His I am sayings, He was making the claim even stronger. That expression was commonly used by religious teachers of the day to describe the Torah, the Law. It meant that the Law provided a person with everything they needed to know about life, God, and eternity. Jesus included those three words to emphasize the sweeping scope of his claim. He's not just claiming to know the way, the truth, and the life. He is making the outrageous claim to BE the way the truth and the life.

Jesus can guarantee that you and I will be welcomed by the Father because He is the one with the Father. Because He is God.

As the way, He reconciles us and brings us into relationship with His Father. He welcomes us to the Father's household. Because Jesus is truth in person, He assures us of the faithfulness of whatever the Father promises. And as the Life, He causes fellowship with God and through that fellowship enables us to experience His peace. Paul write in Romans 5:1-5:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

Note that Jesus says "*No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Jesus is not only saying He's the way to be welcomed into the Father's household, but He's also saying He's the only way. That you can't get there any other way, because they all fall short. You won't be welcomed by the Father, you won't get to heaven by being good. You can't get there by being religious. You can't get there by being sincere or through some other religion. There's no other way to peace than through Him.

Bryan Wilkerson has an interesting way to put it:

Let's say you've had it with so-called springtime in Northern Virginia, and you decide to go to Disneyworld. You go to the airport, and you see your flight listed up on the monitor: flight 2020 to Orlando. Next to your flight number it says, "Gates 21–29." That doesn't make much sense to you, but you head down to the gate area, figuring they'll tell you which gate when you get there. When you arrive, you find that none of the gates have signs on them indicating the flight number or the destination. There are planes out there, and people waiting to board, but you don't know where any of them are going. You turn to some of your fellow travelers and ask, "Which of these flights is going to Orlando?"

They say, "Oh, we were just discussing that. John here likes the look of that 747 out there, so he's going to go through gate 26. But 22 has always been my lucky number, so I'm taking gate 22."

Some lady in the back says, "My son-in-law travels all the time. He knows all about airports. And he said last time he went to Orlando he went out of gate 25, so that's what I'm going to take."

You say, "Yeah, but how do you know it's going to Orlando?"

She answers, "Well, who can know anything for sure? But I figure I've got as good a chance as anybody of getting on the right plane."

Finally, you can't take it anymore, so you go to the desk and ask which of these flights is 2020 to Orlando. And the staff member says, "It's not our policy to tell people which gate they have to fly out of. That would be rather narrow-minded, wouldn't it? I mean, these are all wonderful planes with hard-working crews and

sincere passengers. Who are we to say that one is better than another? Take whichever one you want. They're all going somewhere.”

How ridiculous would that be? But it's just as ridiculous to suggest that all roads lead to heaven, and just as irresponsible to withhold information that can help people get where they want to go. If you don't care where you spend eternity, then it doesn't matter which road you take. But if you want to go to heaven, you'd better be sure you're on the right path. That's the wonderful thing about this narrow way – it's clearly marked, and it really will get you there.

## **CONCLUSION**

So how do we pull all this together? The question is are you looking at your problems or are you looking at the Way, the Truth, and the Life? Our hearts can be at peace only when we believe that knowing Him is knowing the way to the Father.

Commentator William Barclay wrote, “If we believe that in Jesus we see the picture of God, in the face of that amazing love, it becomes not easy, but at least possible, to accept even what we can understand and in the storms of life to retain a faith that is serene.”

In our disappointments and suffering, we will have questions. Many times our hearts will be troubled. We will get upset and we will worry.

When we do, remember that there's gonna be a better day. Our present sufferings are not the end of the story. We will be welcomed into the Father's household. Our guarantee is not our feelings or even the outcome of our problems, but in the great I Am – the Way, the Truth and the Life.

In the face of difficulty great and small, our hearts can be at peace only when we believe that Jesus is the way to the Father. When we know the way to the Father, we know there's gonna be a better day.