

John 14:1-14

This passage from John is somewhat of a farewell discourse from Jesus as he was moving towards the end of his time on this earth. It was tempting for the disciples to give up on the movement with Jesus gone, so this passage of scripture is a way of reminding the disciples that indeed there is a place for them. It would have been very scary to have continued the faith without Christ, but Christ reassures the disciples that indeed there is a place for them in God's kingdom.

Last week I gave a sermon that discussed some scriptural elements of seeking our vision for the congregation. I touched on several things from Acts that we should keep in mind as we go about work in the church, such as fellowship, teaching and learning, spending time in prayer. These are just a few of the elements that we must be cognizant of while we discern God's vision for us.

Yet in all of this process, it may seem that we might get lost in the shuffle. Sometimes we may feel that as we go about all of our work discerning who we need to be in ministry with, we, the existing members of the church might get lost in the process. That's not the goal of course, because the core of this church is in the existing members of congregation. As current members and constituents of Faith Church, you have a very important role to play in the future of this congregation.

Connecting this idea of the existing core membership and the passage from John comes down to this; there is a place for everyone in God's kingdom. Imagine the scariness that would come about if there was not a place for all people in God's kingdom. Some traditions claim that there are only a select few that will become a part of the Kingdom of God. We don't believe in that. All people, future Christians and existing Christians have a place in the church of Jesus Christ.

The process of finding a vision is not to exclude anyone from the church. I believe that we need to be a congregation that welcomes all people. We may focus our ministry on a specific population, but we will minister to all people. I think a fear that many people have is that we will only accept a certain kind of person in the congregation. It's an understandable fear, and it is one that we should keep in to keep us in check. Christ was a person that believed that all people should be welcome at the table.

Throughout our lives, we have had times when we feel that we don't have a place on this earth. I remember many times in school growing up and even today that I know I don't fit in with the in crowd. I was never the center of any social group and I learned to live outside of the popular crowd. As hard as it is to imagine, I'm not exactly the coolest person on earth. I was pretty nerdy and geeky in school, and not much has changed since then. In school I was the nerdy tuba

player who loved computers. Not exactly a person who is going to date the prom queen.

Yet I did find a place for me. I found a place at church with my friends. I had a small group of friends from church, many of whom I keep in contact with today. We were all a bunch of misfits in some way or other, but we experienced the grace of God by being in community with each other. We weren't centered around our personalities, rather we aspired to be centered around Christ and serving the church. The church is where I found a place to call home.

I'm still living into this idea that church is my home. It is this experience of finding a place to call my own that I want to share with other people. This is one reason why I believe that community is so important in the church, because I have experienced a sense of belonging that I believe we should share with others. Christ was a person who believed in a place for people, it says so in the scriptures, so we should make ourselves a community where all people can find a home.

The center of the community I found in school, the center of the community that we should be at the core of what we do, is Jesus Christ. In this passage of scripture we have the famous and important passage of "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." This is a passage that states what is at the core of the identity of Christ, and that is finding a place for God's people from the darkness of the world.

Some folks in churches have trouble with this passage. Some claim that this passage makes it difficult for people to find a place in the church. Some folks state that this passage is a throwback to a time in the past. Whatever folks have to say against this passage, especially people who just look at the surface, are missing the important elements of this statement.

Think of this passage from a missional viewpoint. I view this passage as a sign of extreme devotion, a devotion that we should share. With the Gospel writer including this passage, it is apparent that in Christ there is something special about the Christian faith. Now, that is indeed an understatement, as I believe that Christianity is the source of life for people, but it does give significance to our work.

In giving ourselves to Christ, we have made a claim that there is truth in Christianity that nothing else offers. Some people put all of their faith into things of this world, such as their job, material possessions, or other earthly things. Yet in the end, the people who put their faith in such things will be disappointed, because their faith is not placed in Jesus Christ, who is the truth, the way, and the life.

I remember one time in college I was asked by a classmate who was not Christian why I put my faith in something that I cannot see or cannot experience. I was a bit stunned by the question, because he was a person who tended to not ask questions of such a nature of people. To answer such a question I knew that I had

to be careful. Careful in a way that I could hopefully state my faith in such a way that he would understand and maybe be touched by the Holy Spirit in our conversation.

I told him that I believed that Jesus Christ gives us a way of life that is unlike that of the rest of the world. When the world tells us that we are to give up on hope, Christ tells us to live in more hope. When we are downtrodden and in need of help, Christ tells us that we are to serve others so that we can experience the love of Christ in our lives. Christ gives us a direction to offer a message of hope to people so that they can have a new outlook and life eternal.

I'm not sure if that was the answer my classmate was seeking, but it was the answer that I could give him at the moment. It's a complex question if you think about it, trying to explain your faith in such a way that shows why we should all be Christians and follow the life that Christ lays out for us. It is a weighty question, because in our answer we may be able to light a spark in the life of another person, and possibly lead them to Christ. It's intense stuff.

In our journey in creating a new vision, no matter who we come into contact with, we'll need to be able to explain to others why they should become Christian and why Christ should be the center of their life. We don't have to give giant theological treatises to share our faith, we just need to be able to witness to others in such a way that they think about faith genuinely.

In my process of become an ordained pastor in the United Methodist I am asked why I think Christ is the way. So it's everyone in the church that needs to answer this question, not just a select few people. Being able to answer the question "Why Christ?" will give us a foundation for us to build our mission work to the world.

If anything that comes about in establishing why we believe Christ is the answer for people, we will deepen our faith in Christ and in God. Christ states that the Father is in him and that by knowing Christ we will know the Father. Christ connects us with our Creator, and gives us the opportunity for growth and ultimately salvation.

What is important to know that as Christians we are people set apart by God. We are a people that witness to mighty acts of God, in the past, present, and in the future. As the passage in 1 Peter states "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

It is a great responsibility that we have to spread the Gospel of Christ. Yet in all of this we are not alone. For the Holy Spirit is with us as we are God's own people. The Holy Spirit is present with us as we share our faith with new people. When my classmate asked about my faith the Holy Spirit was present with us as I shared our faith. We are not in this alone, for God is on our side in this process.

It is time for us to live into our faith. It is time for us to be ready to live into the truth, the way and the life. We have the comfort from scripture that we are not to let our hearts be troubled. "Believe in God, believe also in me." Again, we are not alone.

We have a mighty faith to live into. We have a mighty way to guide us in our life. Be prepared to witness our faith to any of God's people. We may be witnessing to a single mom, a drug addict, or a homeless person at any moment. We might be witnessing to a business person, a family man, or a politician. All people need to know the way of Christ, so that they may have the resurrection and the life in them.

The time has come. Are we ready to be the catalyst for other people? Let us pray.