

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. April 20, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W, Ward, Jr.+ Rector

Scripture: Jn. 14:1-16

*"The Key to it All"*

**FOUNDATIONAL WORDS FOR LIFE**

If there is one passage in the Bible that sums up the Christian life and why we follow Jesus Christ as Lord, it is the one we heard from this morning's Gospel reading from John 14. It's a passage every Christian should know if not commit to memory. It comes from the teaching Jesus gave to His disciples on the night before He died on the cross. And it provides us with the foundation for Christian discipleship and the Christian life.

**DO NOT LET YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED**

Jesus begins with this wonderful reminder – *"Do not let your heart be troubled."* There is much in this world that we can be troubled about, isn't there? The Greek word translated "troubled" is *tarassestho*, which comes from the Greek verb *tarasso* which means "to be agitated, disturbed, confused, or frightened." It's being in a state of mental agitation and spiritual confusion. Live long enough and you will experience trouble, heartache, disappointment, frustration, and doubt. You will find yourself in a state of mental agitation and spiritual confusion. It is inevitable. But Jesus says *"Do not let your heart be troubled."* In other words, we don't have to let the feelings that come with heartache and disappointment take control. We can control those feelings.

But how? What's the answer? Jesus says believe in God. It's a proven fact that people who believe in God and go to church do better than people who do not follow God and go to church. It's true about anyone who believes in a higher power. Otherwise, acknowledging a higher power would not be part of the twelve step program for those trying to beat an addiction. But that's just the starting point. Moslems believe in God, Jews believe in God, many of the cults believe in God. Most believe in a higher force or power. But in this context, Jesus is speaking to Jews about believing in *Elohim* - the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob. He is talking about believing in *Yahweh*.

**BELIEVE ALSO IN ME**

But what does Jesus add? He says, *"You believe in God, believe also in Me."* Now what is Jesus doing here? He is saying don't just believe in God but also believe in Me. I think it's easy to miss the significance of this statement. The Greek word, we translate believe, means "to trust." So what Jesus is doing is putting Himself on par with God Himself. Jesus is saying, don't just trust God but trust Me.

You see it's important to believe in God but when we believe in God we are only recognizing God as our Creator. God is still distant because in essence we are speaking of God as a generic being. But Jesus is the One who brings God to earth. Jesus is the One who personalizes God unlike any other.

What does He say next? *"In my Father's house are many dwelling places"* Jesus is so close to the Father that he can talk about His Father's house, His abode, His home and He says there are many rooms there. He also says, *"I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am you may also be."* Jesus says that He is even going to take us to Himself! So do you see why Christ is at the heart of our faith? We are going to Jesus. The truth is heaven is not primarily a place, it is a Person. It is where Jesus is.

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So now let me ask those who believe that we are all on different paths to the same God - how can you not have Jesus to be with Jesus? How can you say you don't need Jesus if you are headed to be with Jesus? You can't. That's why Jesus is necessary for salvation.

### **JESUS IS THE WAY**

Jesus then tells the disciples, "*You know the way where I am going.*" But Thomas says, "*Lord we do not know where we are going, how do we know the way?*" They still don't understand.

So Jesus then affirms as boldly and clearly as He can, what He's already been saying. He tells Thomas, "*I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me.*" My friends that is not an inclusive statement, that is an exclusive statement. In other words, there is no other way, no other truth, no other life except that which Jesus embodies and gives. He is it. He is the way, the truth, and the life and no one can come to the Father except through Him.

And then Jesus adds, "*From now on you have known Him and have seen Him.*" That is what separates us from the Moslems. That is what distinguishes us from the Jews and every other religion in our world. Jesus is God in human flesh.

### **BELIEVE ON ACCOUNT OF THE WORKS THEMSELVES**

But now it's Philip's turn, "*Lord show us the Father, and it is enough for us.*" The disciples still aren't getting the message. Kind of like Oprah or some in the Church - those Episcopalians that teach that we are all on different roads to God.

Do you think you get frustrated with some in the Church? The Lord got frustrated with those in the Church in His day. He says, "*Have I been with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?*" "*Otherwise believe on account of the works themselves.*"

Jesus is saying don't just believe on account of what I've told you, believe on account of what you have seen. Don't believe simply because of the words, believe because of the deeds. Remember from **Mt. 11:4-5**, how Jesus responded when told that John the wondered if Jesus was truly the Messiah? Jesus told John's disciples to go back and tell John that "*the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" Jesus said you will know people by their fruit. It is the same standard He applies to Himself. Believe on account of the works, believe on account of the fruit.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

But now we come to practical application. Jesus said, "*He who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.*" "*And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do.*" Now notice Jesus does not only say this once, but twice. Whenever, the Lord says something once we need to take heed, but twice – well, all the more we need to take notice.

Now aren't those some great promises. But what is Jesus talking about here? Greater works than these? Ask in Christ's name and it will be done? Wow, those are some pretty incredible statements. Do

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you mean we are going to do greater works than Jesus? Yes, we are, but how so? Do you mean we can ask anything in His name, and it will be done? Yes, but again, how so?

**What's the first key? The first key is faith. Hebrews 11: 6. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Matthew 21:22: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."** No prayer has ever been answered that was not a prayer of faith. No prayer of faith has ever been unanswered. And it is not the amount of faith but in whom are you putting your trust. Jesus said, **He who believes in Me.** He who trusts Me. The object of our faith must be Christ. And for that to happen, we must be born again (see **Jn. 3:1-8**).

**And that leads us to the second key?** Jesus tells us that whatever we ask *in His Name*, we will receive. What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? It certainly is not simply a little phrase you tag at the end of a prayer. To pray in Jesus name means to pray according to the authority He has given you. Have you ever heard the expression, "Stop in the name of the law?" That means to stop in the authority of the law. Jesus has given us power of attorney and we can request from the Father those things He wants. Recall the Great Commission in **Mt. 28:18-20** and the authority He had given us to make disciples of all the nations. We are to pray according to this authority.

But to pray in His name means not only to ask with His authority but it means to ask with His approval. When you buy anything with your credit card, what do you have to do? You have to sign your name. When you sign your name you are saying that you approve the purchase. So when we pray in Jesus' name, we're saying we're praying with His approval. And then finally, to pray in the name of Jesus, means to pray in His honor. When we plant a tree or do something in the name of someone who has passed away, we are doing it to honor them. In the same way when we pray in Christ's name we are saying that we are praying to bring Him honor and glory!

What is the third key? **The Holy Spirit.** You see Jesus tells us that He goes to the Father for a specific reason: to send us the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in **Jn. 14:16:** "**And I will ask the Father and He will give you another helper, the Holy Spirit to be with you forever. He will abide with you and be in you.**" It is through the Spirit of Christ that we will do His works on earth. You see when Jesus was on earth, He was limited by His body to a specific time and space. He could only heal so many people, preach to so many people, change so many lives. But something happened after His death and resurrection. He sent the Holy Spirit and it is this Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, Himself, that fills us when we follow Him as Lord. It is the Holy Spirit working through us that accomplishes God's work on earth. You see in order for God to accomplish His work on earth He has to have vessels through which to work. We are His vessels. We are His hands and feet. And so the question is are we allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our lives so that we can truly be Christ's hands and feet?

**That leads is to the fourth key – God's Will.** Are we seeking God's will? Well, we first need to want God's will? Do you even want God's will for your life? For the truth is God's will is not always a comfortable place to be. Jesus was sweating drops of blood in the Garden and though wanting the cup of suffering to pass from Him, He still prayed to His Father, "**Not my will but thy will be done.**" When Jesus said, **Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness** it was another way of saying **seek first God's will.** The reason that many people pray and their prayers are not answered is they're not praying in the will of God. **James chapter 4:3** says, "**You ask and receive not because you ask amiss, that you might consume it upon your lust.**" The word amiss means that you're asking with the wrong intent. Now, that doesn't mean that you cannot ask for personal needs. God's honor is fulfilled when your

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personal needs are met. But you cannot ask for selfish needs. And the way we know God's will is by knowing His Word.

Jesus said in **Mk. 13:31**, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*" In other words, Creation itself will pass away. All that we see will one day end. In fact the present heavens and earth will be destroyed but not Christ's Word. It's one more indication of His divinity. His Word stands forever.

How many here believe everything they read in the newspaper is true? Raise your hand. Now let me ask, How many here believe everything Jesus Christ said is true? Then answer me this, why is it we spend more time reading the newspaper than His Holy Word? Jesus said, "*If you abide in me and my word abides in you, then you can ask what you will and it'll be done unto you.*" (**Jn. 15:7**).

**The fifth key is obedience.** Do you want God to answer your prayers? Don't just pray in faith and in Jesus' name, pray in the Spirit, and according to God's will but we must pray in obedience. What did Jesus say in **Jn. 14:15** – "*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*" Obedience. There are many areas we can be disobedient but are to strive to be more and more obedient in our walks with the Lord. Otherwise, your prayers will not be answered. King David knew this.

David said in **Ps. 66:16**, "*If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.*" But the Bible also says in **1 Jn, 1:9**, "*If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" Moreover, the apostle John says in **1 John 3:22**, "*Whatever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things which are pleasing in his sight.*" I'm not saying, dear friend, that when you obey God, you earn the answer to your prayers. It is grace all the way, but I'm saying to you that you cannot harbor unconfessed, unrepentant sin in your life and expect to have power with God in prayer.

**I'll tell you what else is important - the sixth and final key - fellowship.** The key to fellowship is not only being with your brothers and sisters in Christ in His Church, it is not holding on to grudges or letting bitterness against our neighbor take over. We are called to forgive, to keep short accounts. Jesus said, **Mark 11:25**: "*And when you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who also is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*" Now, if you're out of fellowship with somebody else, you're out of fellowship with the Father. If you have an unforgiving spirit in your heart that will break your fellowship with the Lord and your prayer will be stymied.

And so I ask, do you want the Lord to work in your life? Do you want to see God's will accomplished in you? Do you want to do great things for God's Kingdom? Then it will mean following the principles of prayer Jesus has given us in His Word.

### **A PIVOTAL TIME**

We at St. Bartholomew's are fast approaching a pivotal point in the life of our parish family. God has given us everything we need to accomplish His will. The only thing we need to do is apply it to our personal lives. How much we realize our spiritual potential individually and corporately as a body will be determined by how much we are willing to trust the Lord and obey Him. My prayer is that in the coming weeks and months we all move up a notch in our spiritual walks so that we can experience the great work and blessing God has in store for us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!