

Series: The Upper Room Discourse

John 14:1-14

Home with our Father

by Scott Grant

'Welcome home'

A few years back I spent two months overseas. Experiencing a different culture was exhilarating at first but then became somewhat demanding. I began to yearn for home. After a long flight across the Atlantic, I landed in New York. Bleary-eyed after the 13-hour flight, I passed through customs and held out my passport for the agent. He took a quick glance, noticed how long I'd been gone, handed my passport back to me and said, "Welcome home."

There was nothing special in his voice. He had probably said the same words hundreds of times already that day. But something about those words awakened me out of my comatose state. I experienced a strong emotional reaction that caught me by surprise. Home. I was home.

In John 14:1-14, Jesus tells us about home. Home is not so much a place as it is a Person. Home is with the Father (14:1-3). There are 14 references to the Father in these 14 verses. The way home is Jesus (John 14:4-9). Each time the Father is mentioned, Jesus talks of himself in the same breath, picturing himself as being united with the Father. And Jesus gives us ample evidence to believe his words about his union with the Father (14:10-14).

A place with the Father

John 14:1-3:

(1) Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God; believe also in me. (2) In my Father's house are many dwelling places (if it were not so, I would have told you), for I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am, there you may be also."

In the last verse of John 13, Jesus addresses Peter, but the possessive pronoun "your" in John 14:1 is plural, indicating that he is addressing all the disciples. The disciples had just heard some troubling news: Jesus was leaving them (John 13:33). So Jesus addresses the disciples and their troubled hearts. He knows whereof he speaks, for just a few moments earlier he himself "became troubled in spirit" (John 13:21). When we are troubled, our Lord knows how it feels.

How does Jesus answer a troubled heart? It concerns faith. What we believe determines how we respond when our hearts are troubled. And what are we to believe? Jesus tells his disciples to believe in God and in him. This instruction provides a basis for understanding the rest of the passage. Jesus places himself on the same plane with God. The original word order makes this even more clear: "believe in God; also in me believe."

Jesus invites his disciples to believe in him. If they are to believe in him, they'll believe his words are trustworthy. These words are for those with troubled hearts and for those who will have troubled hearts. In other words, they're for all of us.

He speaks of "my Father's house." He uses the same words in John 2:16 in reference to the temple. The

disciples would no doubt make an identical connection here. But he's referring to a different kind of temple - a reconstituted temple, so to speak. The physical temple, where God dwelt, was a forerunner of the spiritual temple: the people whom God dwells among.

Access to the physical temple was limited. The place of God's enthronement, the most holy place, was entered only by the high priest once a year. David longed to dwell in the tabernacle, the precursor to the temple (Psalm 27:4), and asked the question, "O Lord, who may abide in your tent?" (Psalm 15:1). Jesus says this reconstituted house of the Lord has "many dwelling places." Access is unlimited.

The word for "dwelling place" is the same word used for "abode" in John 14:23, where Jesus speaks of the Father and himself making their abode with a believer through the Holy Spirit. So the dwelling place we have with the Father is not only a future certainty but a present reality. We are presently in the Father's house, with unlimited access to him.

This would strike a special chord with the disciples, who left their homes to follow Jesus. They were homeless. When a scribe expressed a desire to follow Jesus, the Lord said he'd be homeless if he did: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).

The construction of the conditional clause in verse 2 makes it contrary to fact: "If it were not so" (i.e., If there were not many dwelling places, but there are!), "I would have told you" (that there were not many dwelling places).

It is probably best to view these words as parenthetical. If seen that way, the word "for" in verse 2 would introduce the reason for there being many dwelling places in the Father's house. And the reason is the departure of Jesus to "prepare a place for you." We know he's going to the Father (John 13:1, 14:12), but what's involved in the preparation? Jesus tells his disciples that he will "come again." He says in John 14:18 that he will "come" in the person of the Holy Spirit. So his coming again does not concern what we usually refer to as the second coming but to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to welcome believers into the new house of God (Acts 2:1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:13). What preparation did Jesus make? He prepared us! We had to be fit to enter - and ultimately constitute - the new house of the Lord. And fit we are, because the cross of Christ has made us holy. So when Jesus tells the disciples that he's going to prepare a place for them, he's telling them he's going to the cross.

He tells them that when he comes again, he will receive them to himself. The word for "receive" appears in the middle voice, which often connotes the subject acting in some way that benefits himself. Jesus wants to receive us; it's not something he has to do.

This is further enhanced by the purpose of his receiving us, which is "that where I am there you may be also." This is amazing. Jesus wants to be with us. Some of us may feel unwanted, that no one would really want to be with us, least of all Jesus, who knows all the things about us that might make us undesirable. But the word of God stands: His purpose in going, preparing a place for us, coming again in the person of the Holy Spirit and receiving us to himself was to be ... with you!

This is even further enhanced by what the going and preparing involved: a cross of crucifixion, absorption of the wrath of God and separation from his Father. Consider what he went through so that he could fulfill his desire to be with us. This is really amazing. He really wants to be with us.

The disciples would likely see in Jesus' words reference to Jewish marriage customs. The prospective bridegroom would travel from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride and make arrangements. (Jesus left his Father's heavenly house to visit our earthly house.) He would pay a price for the bride and return to his father's house, remaining separate from the woman for 12 months. (Jesus paid the price for our betrothal to him; he died on the cross. Then he ascended to his Father's heavenly house.) After that, the groom would return for his bride and take her to be with him in his father's house. (Jesus returned for us in the person of the Holy Spirit and whisked us away to live with him in our Father's heavenly house, where we currently dwell [Ephesians 2:6].)

It's as if we were vagabonds, wandering in search of a home. Jesus seeks us out, cleans us up and gives us a clean set of clothes. He takes us by the hand and leads us to a home that's beyond our conception of reality. And then we find out that he himself is the host of the house. He invites us in and says, "Welcome home. I'm so happy you're here." And then he says, "Wait until I introduce you to my Father. He'll be so pleased to see you."

The Lord's answer to a troubled heart, if we were to translate it into our culture, is simply the words, "Welcome home." Our home is with the Lord. In verses 4 through 9, Jesus tells us about the way home.

The way to the Father

John 14:4-9:

(4) "And you know the way where I am going." (5) Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how do we know the way?" (6) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me. (7) If you have known me, you will know my Father also; from now on you know him and have seen him." (8) Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." (9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you and you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Jesus' interaction with Thomas concerns the way to Jesus' destination. His destination is the Father (John 13:1; 14:2, 12). Jesus tells the disciples that they know this way. Thomas, who doesn't think he knows the way, believes Jesus to be mistaken. But he does know the way. The way is Jesus himself, and Thomas knows Jesus. Thomas knows the way; he just doesn't know that he knows the way.

In verse 6, Jesus clearly identifies himself as the way to his destination. He is also "the truth" and "the life," which are best understood as descriptive of the way, for the preceding flow of thought concerns the way, as does the last statement in verse 6. Truth, in Hebrew thought, meant faithfulness, or reliability. There are many roads, but if one takes the wrong one, it can be disastrous. When Jesus says he is the truth, it means that he is the true way - the faithful, reliable and dependable way. A few moments later, Jesus will describe life as knowing "the only true God and Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). The way concerns life: knowing God.

Note that Jesus' homeward destination is a Person: the Father. Note also that the way to that Person is also a Person: Jesus. The answer to a troubled heart is not to find our way out of trouble but to believe that we have a home in the midst of trouble - home with our Father, home with Jesus.

When we find ourselves in trouble, we're likely to look for a way out - some principle that we can follow that will give us relief. We'll ransack the scriptures or the Christian bookstores, looking for the principle that addresses our particular pain. But Jesus is the way. He doesn't say he provides the way; he *is* the way. Like Thomas, we may know Jesus without knowing that he is the way. We may be looking to him to find us a way. We may want Jesus to provide us with the secret principle that will bring relief, but Jesus provides us with ... himself.

The way, then, is caught up in the idea of relationship: knowing Jesus, knowing the Father. This is difficult for us. We want relief; God wants relationship. Principles are black and white; relationship involves mystery. But relationship really is the answer to a troubled heart. It's what we really want, even more than relief, though we may not know it. Augustine's most recognized quote is apt here: "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in him."

The grammar of verse 6 regarding the exclusivity of the way could not be more emphatic. Both the pronouns "I" at the beginning of Jesus' sentence in verse 6 and "me" at the end represent emphatic constructions. The definite article "the" appears before "way," "truth" and "life." And "no one" comes to the Father but through Jesus. The claim of Jesus of Nazareth is clear: He is the only way to God. There is no other way, not even one. The claim to be the exclusive way is his. We simply believe what he says.

Verse 7, once again, is all about relationship, not relief. Jesus equates knowing him with knowing the Father. He addresses not just Thomas here but all the disciples, for the pronoun "you" is plural. The grammatical construction of the conditional clause suggests that the condition has been met: "If you have known me" (as indeed you have), "you will know my Father also." The verb "will know" in the conclusion appears in the future tense, a likely reference to the day of Pentecost, when they were more fully introduced to the Father by the Holy Spirit.

But also in verse 7, Jesus tells them something is happening "now." From "now on" they know the Father. It's not that they haven't known the Father; it's just that they haven't realized that they've known him. Jesus says "you *have seen* the Father." All along the Father has been revealed to them in the person of Jesus. It's as if Jesus is telling them, "Let me explain to you what you've been seeing. You've been seeing the Father."

Now Philip is the one who doesn't quite understand. He says to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." He still doesn't understand that when he's been looking at Jesus, he's been looking at the Father. He has indeed seen the Father, and it's not enough for him. Jesus is enough; he just doesn't know it. Jesus - knowing Jesus - is enough for us; we just don't know it.

The grammar of the question Jesus asks in verse 9 suggests that he expects a positive answer: Philip had indeed come to know Jesus. And if he has seen Jesus, he has seen the Father. Therefore, he doesn't need to ask Jesus to show him the Father, because he's looking right into the eyes of the Father.

In that Thomas knew Jesus, he know the way; he just didn't know he knew the way. In that Philip knew Jesus, he knew the Father; he just didn't know he knew the Father. At this point they don't yet understand, much as we don't yet understand, that it's all about home and that home is all about relationship.

In the summer of 1992 I was part of a small team that visited a church of Gypsies in Bulgaria, living with them and teaching them for two weeks. They opened up their homes and hearts to us. I developed a special affinity for their pastor, Nicolai, who was enormously appreciative of our investment in his church. I returned the next summer with a different team. When Nicolai saw me, he gave me a huge cheek-to-cheek bear hug and kept saying, "Hallelujah." The thought occurred to me, "I'm home." I was halfway around the world, but I was home. It was all about relationship.

Our true home is with the Lord. We are there with him, even now. Jesus is the way home. Jesus is the way to the Father, and Jesus is enough.

This is difficult for us to grasp, just as it was for the disciples. So Jesus helps us along by giving us reasons to believe him.

Evidence of the Father

John 14:10-14:

(10) "Do 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 initiative, but the Father abiding in me does his works. (11) Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; otherwise, believe on account of the works themselves. (12) Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works that these shall he do, because I go to the Father. (13) And whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

Once again, in verse 10, Jesus asks a question for which he expects a positive answer. He expects that Philip understands that Jesus is in the Father and that the Father is in Jesus. But Philip and the rest of the disciples need help with their faith, so Jesus gives it to them.

Five times in two verses Jesus uses the word "in" to refer to the relationship between the Father and himself. This speaks of the union between the Father and the Son. Jesus uses the same terminology in John 17:21 in speaking of his oneness with the Father. His oneness with the Father is the basis for his authority. The

oneness is such that his authority to speak comes from the Father.

Not only does his speech stem from his relationship with the Father, but his works do as well, for it is "the Father abiding in me" who does his works.

His purpose for telling them this becomes clear in verse 11. Once again, speaking to all the disciples, he says, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father (is) in me." The reason to believe his oneness with the Father is the works that the Father does through him. The Father's hand is evident in the kind of works Jesus does. They are works, even miraculous works, of truth, love and healing - clear evidence of the presence of the Father. The disciples had had plenty of opportunity to observe the works - and therefore see Jesus' oneness with the Father.

We have the same opportunity. All we have to do is check out our own lives. Has Jesus effected any work of truth, love or healing in our lives? If he has, we know that Jesus is one with the Father, and that we can believe what he says: that he is the way to the Father, and that he is enough - that knowing God, not finding relief, is the answer to a troubled heart.

Not only is there internal evidence of the work of Jesus in our own lives, there is the external evidence of the way his work in us affects others. In verse 12 Jesus says that the one who believes in him will do the same works as Jesus and even greater works than him. In what sense are these works greater? First of all, they are greater "because" Jesus went to the Father. And in going to the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17), who dwells in us just as he dwelt in Jesus. Not only that, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit began his ministry to the world (John 15:26-27, 16:8). Peter's sermon that day resulted in 3,000 converts (Acts 2:41).

The Spirit who dwells in us transforms us and also goes forth and enables us to be a blessing in the lives of others. We encourage those in the house of the Father, and God uses us to bring others into it. If we see that God has blessed us with the blessing of being a blessing to someone, that is evidence that Jesus is one with the Father and that we can therefore trust him.

Much as the effect of a chemical reaction demonstrates that two chemicals are in contact with each other, the work of Jesus in truth, love and healing in and through the life of a believer demonstrates Jesus' union with the Father.

Verses 13 and 14 are in the same flow of thought: works as evidence for faith in Jesus. He tells his disciples that he will do whatever they ask him, provided that it is in his name for the purpose of glorifying the Father. The flow of thought indicates that "whatever" is not whatever per se but the works of Jesus in and through the life of a believer. In order for that to happen, we must be growing to be like Jesus. So if we ask Jesus to make us like himself, he'll make us like himself: more bold, more gentle, more loving. But if we ask for such fruit, we need to know that it comes at a painful price as Jesus answers our prayers by pruning our pride.

Peter did a greater work than Jesus on the Day of Pentecost, but it wouldn't have happened if he hadn't boldly preached the gospel in the face of opposition. And he only became bold, like Jesus, through and after the excruciating humiliation of denying Jesus three times.

These words that they would do "greater works" than Jesus must have left the disciples slack-jawed. They're in confusion and turning the corner toward despair, yet somehow, some way, great days lie ahead. When we're in confusion and despair, we can take solace in the words of Jesus: Great days lie ahead. The best is yet to come.

Thus, Jesus answers prayers in his name. This is not some magical incantation that includes the words "in Jesus' name"; it is a prayer in line with his will. It is a request that he can sign his name to. If it concerns character growth, which often is accompanied by the painful pruning of pride and always is spurred on by intimacy with God, it's in his name.

Jesus answers such prayers so that "the Father may be glorified in the Son." Glorification means revelation of

identity. If the Father is revealed in the Son, the Son's relationship to the Father is also revealed, which is the point of verses 10 through 14. Therefore, Jesus answers prayer in his name in order to reveal the Father and his relationship to the Father. Such prayers concern the works of Jesus in the life of a believer, which reveal Jesus' relationship to the Father, which thereby demonstrates Jesus to be trustworthy.

The answer to a troubled heart

We have a home with the Father. We are with Jesus and the Father in the Father's house even now. Jesus is the way to the Father: Knowing him and knowing the Father are enough. And we can trust Jesus and his words because of the works we see the Father do through him and in us. The answer to a troubled heart is simply being with our Lord: sharing with him, adoring him, worshiping him.

- SCG, 1995

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