

## Easter 2020

### *“Where I am, you will be also...”*

As most of you know, my parents are both getting on in years. My Dad is 96 - my Mom, 92; and both are dealing with the realities of age and declining health. But the issue that most magnifies the pain of this march of time is the loss of those they know and love. Many friends, family, and former church members have long preceded them in death, some in the last few months. And one of the hardest of those losses for my Dad, was the death of his younger sister, Clarice, now some 8 years ago. That loss left my Dad as the last of three siblings living.

I remember the service was pretty well attended by extended family, all wishing to pay their respects. There was music, scripture, family remembrances, and my dad shared the message. It was a beautiful time celebrating both the life of my aunt and the faithfulness of God. It was also a time to reflect on the wonderful heritage that our family has shared together over many decades of combined history. And the passage that acted as the foundation of the service was from John 14:1-6, these are verses which are often shared at funerals.:

**John 14:1-6** "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "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." 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. "And you know the way where I am going." Thomas \*said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus \*said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

As the service started, I thought of my Dad, at that time pushing 90. He had been a pastor for over 60 years, and was always the consummate professional; but I was kind of concerned how he was going to handle the task of sharing the sermon at such an emotional time. I was concerned that his age and physical limitations might impact his preaching for his younger Sister.

Dad's time came, he stepped into the pulpit, prayed, and then began:

*“My sister has never been able to get away from me. When she was born into our family, I was there. Trucks, cars, jacks and balls were all the toys she knew. My world became her world.*

*When it was time for her to attend school, I was already there waiting on that first day. On her first day of High School, again, I had already established myself in the two years that I had preceded her. And whose face greeted her on her first day of college? Mine!”*

At about this time I began to wonder where my dad was going with this message. Maybe he was taking a little time at the beginning to share some of his own personal memories of Clarice (my aunt). Until he shared the next line:

*“But now the tables are turned. She has entered into a*

*place that I have longed to go. I am now the one following behind her. And one day, when my time has come, hers will be one of the faces I see on that great day of reunion with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

It was at that point that my concerns for my father went away, but my thoughts about the truth of that thought stuck with me. To be honest, I can't remember much of the rest of his message. I couldn't stop thinking about that simple point, and it's bearing on this particular season of the year, Easter. What my Dad said about His sister, is so true for each of us. “The truth of heaven and the resurrection has turned the tables on everything!”

Even today, as I think about that simple point, I can't help but think about all the things in life that are impacted by that truth.

#### **1. There is a real place called heaven.**

Just as each of us left the world of our mother's womb and entered this one, so also will we enter a world very different than our own. It won't be a different phase of this world, such as moving from grade-school, to high school, and then college, etc. Neither is heaven a place or state of mind here on earth, as some deceitfully profess, though we sometimes get glimpses of heaven through the splendor of this creation.

Heaven is a real place which is being personally prepared for God's children by the Risen Jesus our Lord Himself; not a world already created for habitation such as our own. This means heaven is a place we can't get to until Jesus has returned there first.

**John 13:33** "Little children, I am with you a little while longer.

You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'

**John 14:2b** "... for I go to prepare a place for you.

But after Jesus has gone home and our time comes, then we will follow. As Jesus told Peter in John 13:36:

**John 13:36** Simon Peter \*said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

#### **2. There is only one way into Heaven; through the way-Maker, Jesus Christ.**

**John 14:4** "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.

Jesus tells His disciples quite matter-of-factly, “You know the way where I am going.” And maybe it should have been obvious to Jesus' followers by then...But it wasn't. So Thomas, the literalist, asked the question everyone else was thinking.

“Lord we don't even know where you are going, how are we supposed to know how to get there?” Thomas hits on the core problem. If heaven is unlike this world, a place that we can only get to after Jesus has gone there, then how will we be able to make the trip? Jesus' answer brings them full circle, “I am the way, and the truth, and

*the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”*

Okay Jesus, that’s all well and good, You are the way. But that still doesn’t tell me how to get there. Jesus told them in chap.13 that He was going somewhere they couldn’t follow, until later. In chapter 14 Jesus explains that He is going to His Father’s house to prepare a place for them. But the real answer to the how is in verse 3, “... *I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, {there} you may be also.*”

Let me explain it this way. If I’m going on a journey, I don’t want someone leading the way, or giving me directions who hasn’t been there first. I want to be led, or directed by someone who has traveled there first, or better yet, lives there. And this is the case with Jesus. As we see in Phil.2:

**Phil 2:6-8** who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, {and} being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

### **3. Jesus resurrection and the promise of heaven frees us from the troubles of this world.**

**John 14:1** "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

We often think of God in terms of infinite power, wisdom, and presence; but struggle to think of Jesus in those same terms. This really shows our Biblical and theological ignorance. Because throughout His ministry, Jesus challenged His followers to understand His unique oneness with the Father. Even our view of heaven is impacted by this truth.

Faith in Jesus Christ and His ability to span continents and even time and space should dispel the troubles and fears of our hearts. “Believe in God, believe also in Me” Jesus said. This is a challenge of faith that allows the hope of heaven to be the comfort for a world in crisis.

### **4. The promise of our resurrected Jesus’ personal preparation should bring peace and confidence.**

**John 14:2** "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.

I don’t know if you remember the movie *Apollo 13*, but just days before the launch, the lead pilot (Ken Mattingly) is cut from the mission. But later, when the endangered crew need someone to help figure out how to bring the ship home, they call on the experienced Mattingly to guide them through the process. So when the crew gets nervous and fearful about the lack of re-entry plans, they relax when they are told, “Mattingly is working on them.” In the same way, if you have questions or doubts about heaven, just remember, “Jesus is working on it,” and those doubts should be dispelled.

### **5. The truth of resurrection and heaven should give hope to the fearful, and power to the weak.**

**John 14:1** "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God,

**believe also in Me. 2 ... for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "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.**

These words were spoken to the disciples before Jesus’ crucifixion. For them to come true, Jesus would have to come back to life. If He had stayed in the tomb, all of these promises would have been simply wishful thinking at least, and outright lies at worst.

But the truth is that Jesus did not stay in that tomb; He has risen, glorified and victorious. As a result, death has been vanquished, the price of sin has been paid, and the promise of heaven has been secured. Worldly dangers need not paralyze us, earthly concerns should not overwhelm us, and spiritual attacks cannot defeat us.

**Matthew 28:5-7** The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. <sup>7</sup> Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

The truth of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to glory changes everything. It has turned the tables on our fear, uncertainty, and insecurity; and it reinforces the truth of all Jesus has said and promised. Jesus’ guarantee of heaven emboldens a people who, like Thomas, struggle with the doubts and questions of this life. And I can’t think of a better time to hold fast to the certainty of Jesus’ resurrection hope...both for now – and for eternity!