

A devotional podcast from the Village Pastor, Melinda Pupillo

A reading from the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel...

[Jesus said:] <sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going.” <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to Jesus, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Thomas' question is real. It cuts to the heart of the matter for many of us right now: This pandemic has changed so much. Many have had to live with this terrible virus, and many more live in fear of what will happen when we do contract the virus. In the meantime, we are cut off from much of the human support that we depend upon, and feelings of isolation are real. We don't know where this is all going, so like Thomas we wonder, “How can we know the way?”

In this place of “not knowing” I have heard so many stories of people being creative, of people finding new ways to bridge the gaps between us. In the village this week, we have people reaching out to each other secretly with kindness as a Quiet Quanta (think Secret Santa.) All are in need some encouragement right now, and this is how we have chosen to make it happen here. How are you bringing encouragement to people in your community? Have you figured out how to ask for support when you need it?

This exchange between Jesus and Thomas happens on the night in which Jesus was betrayed. He has been with them for 3 years, and now he must face his own death. The disciples knew this. I wonder if Thomas' question comes less out of a place of not knowing and more out of a place of fear. None of us can know what the future holds...even in the best of times. Usually we function pretty ok with not knowing. But it is in times of more extreme uncertainty, where the future feels all the more unpredictable, it is THEN that many of us demand answers. Answers that cannot be ours.

I believe that the church, that faith communities, and in some ways, that people in general, have had the curtain of certainty pulled back on us. Especially if our privilege has provided us with a false stance of thinking we can predict the future. We cannot. And learning how to live into this understanding may be our greatest gift.

Jesus doesn't give exact instructions, with points A, B and C, that we are to follow. He prepares a place for us at the end of our journeys, but he does not dictate the steps we must take to get there. Instead he shows us the way, and it is through him and how he has lived his life, that we find our way. His way, truth and life become

conversation partners for us as we forge our own journey into ventures unknown. Think of the freedom that is being offered here! And the invitation.

What if this halt in our expected behaviors is a chance to take stock in what really matters? What programs take most of our time and money? Are they worth it? And who do they serve, really? Where is privilege built into our systems so that the less-involved feel like outsiders? Where do you see yourself in this effort? Because many are choosing to self-select out of any kind of organized religion.

Author, Diana Butler Bass, in her book “Grounded” says it’s some of the most faithful who are leaving their communities. And it’s not because they prefer Sunday brunch or sports events. It’s not because they are too busy or even lacking in moral passion.

She writes:

“We are not lazy, self-centered, or individualistic church shoppers.

We are heartbroken. Heartbroken by the fact that the faith traditions that raised us, and that we love, seem to be sleeping through the revolution.”

And what’s that revolution, you ask? It’s people caring more about the Gospel than their institution. It’s people who are willing to take risks and try new ideas. And not just in small ways, but all things new. This can be both terrifying and invigorating.

Jesus’ disciples were coming out of a long Jewish history of living into the Law. But the letter of the law had become to exacting, and a way for those in leadership to point out people’s failings. That was not it’s intent. Thomas, I think, wanted some clear directions. And Jesus said, no.