

I have preached on this passage from John's gospel, chapter 14, literally scores of times, but always at funerals, because it's a great reading for funerals with its promise of a heavenly home and a future.

I did once have a very snooty parishioner who took me to one side and said, "I want you to read this at my funeral in the King James version." He was adamant about that, because in the King James version, it says, "In my father's house, there are many mansions." He said, "I've always lived in a mansion. I don't see why it should be any different in heaven."

But for some reason, although I've preached about it scores of times at a funeral, I looked in my files, I've never preached on this passage on a Sunday. I've never preached on it outside of a funeral. So, I was reading it afresh this week and I was struck by how many rich themes there are that a preacher could pick up and speak on in this passage.

I've narrowed it down and chosen just to speak about one word, but it's a word that comes several times. In fact, it comes more than six times in the opening paragraph alone. And that word is "to know". It seems to me that this passage has a lot to teach us about how we know. How can we be sure about what we know? What does it mean to speak about truth in terms of faith? And these are important questions as relevant now as they were in Jesus' time.

And the reading comes straight after the last supper. So, Jesus has been preparing his disciples for what's to come next, of his crucifixion and his resurrection. And in the verses immediately preceding where this passage begins, Jesus has told St. Peter that he will deny him three times before the cock crows. And what he said has unsettled the disciples. That's why he begins our reading by saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," because they were troubled.

So, what does Jesus promise them in the midst of their uncertainty? He assures them that he's going to prepare a place for them, and that he will not abandon them. That's one of the big themes of what Jesus is saying. He assures them of his presence that he'll always be with them. "Where I am, you may be also," he says.

Is that enough for the disciples? Does this untrouble their hearts? It wouldn't appear so. Thomas says,

"We don't know where you were going, so how can we know the way? You've not told us enough," he's saying. "We want more detail." And another disciple, Philip, pipes in to reinforce the point. He says, "Lord, show us the Father and we'll be satisfied." In other words, "We're not satisfied now. We want more clarity, more proof. Give us real evidence and we'll be satisfied." And Philip here is speaking for many of us, many people down the century who've said something similar. Bertrand Russell, the famous British atheist, was once asked what would he say to God if he died, only to discover that there was after all a God, and he finds himself at the Pearly Gates. What would he say? And he thought about it. And he said, "Well, I'd say to God, 'You gave us insufficient evidence.'"

The desire for certainty is always there. And if anything, it's getting stronger these days, as so much is changing, so much is in a state of flux. We look to cling onto something of which we can be certain, whether that's an ideology, or a political viewpoint, whatever it is, we're all seeking for firm ground. And Jesus speaks of truth in a very particular way. He says, "I am the truth. If you know me, you will know my Father." For Jesus, truth is personal. It's not some abstract concept. It's personal. "I am the truth," he says. And this is a truth which is difficult to pin down. It's more elusive than we might want it to be. It's harder to grasp. It's a truth that's not written down. It's a truth that can't be stated in propositions. Yet for us as Christians, the reality of the God made known in Jesus Christ is the foundation of all truth. "If you know me," Jesus says, "You will know my Father also." That's why Jesus can say, "I am the truth."

As an Englishman, I'm very reluctant to say anything positive about the French. But I do admire this about their language. They very wisely have two words for "to know". Two words to describe the act of knowing. The first, *savoir*, means to know something in your head. It's a kind of knowing the answer to a simple mathematical question. The second is *connaître*, and I'm only waiting for Arnaud to correct my pronunciation after the service. *Connaître*, it's a relational word. I'd use it to speak of how I know a friend, or how I know a place. There are things that can be proved, and there are things that can be known, but not be proved. Two ways of knowing. We could say that there are some things that we know

with our head, and some things that we know in our heart. Both can be true.

We get a glimpse of that in this passage. Jesus is talking about their hearts. "Don't let your hearts be troubled," he says. But Thomas and Philip weren't satisfied by that. They wanted something different. I think they wanted something for their head. They wanted certainty. And we had this a couple of weeks ago in a great reading. Do you remember those two disciples walking away from Jerusalem to Emmaus on that first Easter morning? And Jesus just sidles up to them and walks with them and talks with them on the journey and then spends the evening with them. And it's only when Jesus breaks the bread that they finally recognize him, the penny drops. And that's the moment he vanishes from their sight. And the first thing they said was, "Weren't our hearts burning within us on the road?"

And I think what was happening is that their head was lagging behind their heart. They knew on the road in their hearts that it was Jesus, but they couldn't bring themselves to believe it. Their head had to come to know as well. Faith requires both kinds of knowledge, both kinds of knowing. There is a rational intellectual foundation to our faith. It's important that Jesus was a historical figure that he really did raise from the dead.

Theology matters. Our faith needs to be coherent and intellectually robust, but faith can't be reduced to logic. We can only really know the truth that Jesus is speaking about, that he is the truth, we come to know that in our hearts, as we commit ourselves to him. And I'm mindful that many of us struggle to conceive how we might do that.

So let me just give two thoughts to ponder. The first is that we can train ourselves to develop a "heart knowledge" of Jesus. St. Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, was a lawyer, and as rational as anybody else has ever been. But he said this, "I delight in the law of God in my inmost self." And I take that to mean that when he was studying God's word, he wasn't just doing it to learn more, to get more information. He wanted it to feed his soul, his inner self. Other translations use the word "heart" here. So, Paul has Paul saying, "I delight in the law of God in my heart."

And one way of doing this is something we talk about at St. James called the *Lectio Divina*, a slow way of reading scripture, where we don't just read it to sort of tick a box, or get through a different book, but we take a bit of scripture, and we just read it very, very slowly. And we might just pause at a sentence that catches our attention, and we chew on it, we mull over it. Then we might focus just on a word. And the point is to try and get those words of scripture from our head into our hearts, as we chew on a word and maybe turn it into a prayer, to take God's word deep into us, into our inner self, our heart. We're not just called to know about God. We're called to seek him, to come to know him, to have an encounter with the living God, to know him deep in our hearts.

And the second thought I'd like to share is about doubt. Heart knowledge, that true and saving faith in God's truth will always have an element of doubt. We can never be completely sure in the sense of we can't prove it. Otherwise, we wouldn't use the word faith. We'd be talking about something else. Faith includes doubt. So, we shouldn't be scared of doubt. We should embrace it as an essential part of faith. Even science has the Heisenberg principle of uncertainty.

The writer, Brené Brown, writes this: "I spent a lot of years trying to outrun or outsmart vulnerability by making things certain and definite, black and white, good and bad. My inability to lead into the discomfort of vulnerability limited the fullness of those important experiences that are wrought with uncertainty, love, belonging, trust, joy, and creativity, to name a few."

It's hard to give up certainty, but it's something that we need to embrace. It's only giving up trying to control God and his truth, that we can enter into the vulnerability in which true faith is nurtured. We can't know everything, but we can know enough. We can come to know Jesus, just as he knows us. Amen.