

John 14:1-14

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 3rd, 2025

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There is a moment I just cannot shake. Two weeks ago I was sitting in the Hattiloo Theatre watching *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. And there is this character, Levee Green, who carries inside of him a pain that is almost too much to witness. Trauma from childhood. Violence that should never have happened. A wound that never closed. And at one point, that pain comes to the surface. Levee is holding a knife. His whole body is shaking. And he starts yelling. Not at anyone in the room, but at God. Where are you?

Where are you? Where are you? He keeps shouting it. Louder and louder. The whole theater could feel it. It was not acting anymore. It felt like something ancient had broken open. And through the obscenities and reviling and wailing what struck me in that moment was this. That was not blasphemy. That was prayer. That was the psalmist crying out, How long, O Lord? That was the human heart refusing to pretend. That was someone reaching for God with everything he had left.

And if we're being honest, almost every single one of us has had some version of that moment. Maybe not out loud. Maybe not with that intensity. But somewhere in our lives, we have asked it. Where are you? Where are you when things fall apart? Where are you when the diagnosis comes? Where are you when relationships break? Where are you when the world feels like it is unraveling?

And we are living in a moment right now where that question does not feel theoretical. It feels immediate. There is fear in the air. There is anger in the air. There is confusion. There is heartbreak. There is a sense that something is not right. Because it's not right. And I want to say something about that anger. Because there is anger. Real anger. And I do not think it is empty. I think it is connected to love. I think it is connected to grief.

I think it is connected to a deep knowing that something sacred matters. Anger, heartbreak, frustration. They live together. And that anger can do one of two things. It can consume us. It can harden us. It can turn us inward. Or it can be transformed.

If we are rooted in the way and the truth and the life, that anger does not disappear. It is taken up into something larger. It becomes action. And that action becomes love. Not sentimental love. Not easy love. But real love. The kind that shows up. The kind that stays. God's love. Christ's love. I have people in my life, people I love deeply, who will say to me, Wesley, I believe in something. I believe there is a higher power. But I cannot get with that whole Jesus thing. And I get it. Because the name of Jesus has been used in ways that wound. Used in ways that exclude. Used in ways that distort the very heart of who he is.

But I also want to say this as clearly as I can. The Jesus thing IS the thing, and it is the best thing. And I am not standing here talking about Jesus as an idea. I am not talking about Jesus as just a good man. I am not talking about Jesus as one voice among many. I am talking about Jesus Christ as Lord. And I stake my entire life on that. Not as a metaphor. Not as poetry. Not as a nice religious sentiment. But as something real. Something true. Something that changes everything. It can be easy to place Jesus safely in the past. A historical figure. A teacher. A radical voice who said beautiful things about love and justice and the kingdom of God. And all of that is true. But it is not the whole truth. Because what the Gospel is telling us, what the Church has proclaimed across centuries, what we confess when we stand and say the Creed, is this. Jesus Christ is Lord. And if that is true, then nothing is the same. Not our lives. Not our suffering. Not our fear. Not even death.

And in the Gospel of John, in this long farewell discourse, Jesus knows that his disciples do not fully understand this yet. He knows what is coming. He knows the cross is near. He knows everything is about to look like failure. And he is trying to tell them, before it happens, who he is. Not just who he was. Not just what he did. But who he is. He says to them, in my Father's house there are many dwelling places. There is room. There is space. There is belonging. And then he says, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. Not as a slogan. Not as a boundary line. As a promise. You will not lose your way. Because I am the way. You do not have to go searching for truth. Because I am the truth. You do not have to fear that life will slip away from you. Because I am the life.

And then he says something almost impossible to comprehend. You will do greater works than these. Because I will be with you. My life will not end. It will move through you. And then, in John 16, finally, at the very end of this beautiful goodbye, Jesus says, in this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. And I want to stay with that word for just a moment. Overcome. Not will overcome. Not might overcome. Have overcome. Which means that even when everything looks like it is falling apart, that is not the final truth. Because Christ is Lord. And if Christ is Lord, then the deepest reality of the world is not chaos. It is not fear. It is not violence. It is not even death. No. The deepest reality of the world is Christ.

Alive. Present. Holding all things together. And I know that can sound like too much. Because we look around and we think, if Christ has overcome the world, why does it look like this? And there are moments, even as a preacher, when that question sits heavy. There are moments when I wonder, what are we doing here? Week after week, we gather. We pray. We preach. Are we making any difference? Are we just talking to ourselves? Are we offering comfort without any real change? That discontent is real. That question is real. And it is into that exact space that Jesus speaks. Not to people who have it all figured out. But to people who are about to be afraid, confused, scattered. And I imagine him taking their faces in his hands and saying, look at me. Look at me. I am here. Right here! And I am not going anywhere. And this is where it becomes concrete. Not abstract. Not distant. Concrete. We come to this table. Not because everything is fixed. Not because we understand everything. But because we believe that Christ is not only Lord of heaven. Christ is present here. In bread. In wine. In this moment. A foretaste of a heavenly banquet that is already here and not yet fully seen.

And this is what the church, at its best, offers. I think about something I have heard in recovery spaces. When someone walks in broken, ashamed, convinced they are unlovable, someone will say, let us love you until you can love yourself. That is Christ. That is not an idea. That is not theory. That is Christ alive in the world. We receive that love. We begin, slowly, to believe it. And then we pass it on. And so, when you find yourself asking, where are you, you are not alone. You are standing in a long line of people who have asked that question. And the answer is not an explanation. It is not a formula. It is not a set of answers. It is a presence. Christ the Lord. Here. Alive. Closer than your next breath. Holding your anger. Holding your heartbreak. Holding your life. Holding your precious face in his hands. And saying to you, even now, I am the Way. I am the Truth. I am the Life. Christ is Risen. Right here. Right now.