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St. John's Episcopal Church
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Easter 5 A (John 14:1-14)

"No one comes to the Father except through me."

Yikes.

Just when I thought we were out of hot water last Sunday, here we are again, back into the pot. The rallying cry of Christian triumphalism. The litmus test of *believers*. Proof positive the Christians have a corner on God and that people of any other faith – or *no* faith – are doomed. Banished to that lower place. Roasting for eternity.

Let's have a crusade! Heck, why stop there – let's have an Inquisition! Let's round up all those infidels and eliminate them once and for all. Let's kick them out of our churches, our communities, heck, why stop there – let's kick them out of our country and not let any more of them back in! In fact, let's build a *wall* between us and those crazy Canadians and Mexicans and let's bar Muslim people for the protection of our Christian way of life!

But along the way, let's make sure that the Christians we *do* have here are pure. Unquestioning believers. The rest of them, well, they're heretics or Episcopalians and they don't belong in the church. Better yet, let them have their *own* church, and then we won't have to deal with them.

Oh – what's that you say about your Father's house having many rooms? Well, sure, there's one for me, and one for our pastor, and one for our music director and one for our Altar Guild, and then we'll just have to pick and choose who gets the other rooms, because there really are only a few.

Jesus? Well, of *course* Jesus gets a room – he's got the whole darned house! He's a believer, isn't he? What's that you say? Nawwwwww, don't tell me Jesus didn't read the Bible, Matthew and Mark and Luke and I'm sure I heard that he had the book of John memorized. What? It wasn't written yet? Aw, c'mon, you're pulling my leg! *No way!* I mean, Jesus was a Christian, wasn't he?

Oh. He wasn't? There wasn't any such thing? There was no *church*?!! Well, what did people do on Sunday mornings? They slept in? Because they'd gone to *synagogue on Saturday*?!! You mean...they were *Jewish*?

First you say that Jesus didn't read the New Testament.
Then you say he wasn't a Christian.
Then you say he was *Jewish*.

I'll be darned.

And so it goes.

Christian arrogance, Christian assumptions, Christian pride.

When we read the Bible,
we

must
tread
lightly.

We must read carefully.

We must understand the context of its writings, the theology of the writers, and we must discern as best we can how God may be speaking to us through other people. We must, in other words, allow our minds to work with our hearts – to let them dance in a ballet of mutual understanding and compassion.

We
must
read
carefully.

And we must remember: That in the mansion called heaven, there are many, many rooms.

Take another sentence from today's Gospel lesson: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Well, for me that is true. For me, Jesus Christ is the way I relate to the divine. Jesus Christ is the truth I dimly perceive when I consider *who God is*. And Jesus Christ is the one who promises me everlasting life – and a life of spiritual abundance here on earth.

But *did* Jesus really mean that he is the *only* way to God? I don't know – and, unfortunately, I'm going to have to wait for the answer.

It seems to me that in today's Gospel lesson – actually, throughout the book of John – we are being shown how Jesus' unique relationship with God the Father gives us a new way of exploring our *own* relationship with God. Jesus' Father-Son relationship was something new and something radical in the Judaism of the First Century – *and never forget: It was dangerous.*

When Jesus says, I am *the* way to the Father, is he discounting the possibility of other ways? As so many Christians have done?

Perhaps he is. But I don't think so.

The God I worship, the God I know just *fractionally* is a God who has over and over embraced his creation, the God who over and over again has called his people back to him, the God who over and over again has reached out to save a broken world.

Why would that God turn his or her divine back on people who are good, people who are compassionate, people who are generous – because they aren't Christian?

Is God a Christian?

We must remember that the Bible is a human response to the sacred. The writers of Holy Scripture have done the best they can to tell us a story – a story of such profound depth and such deep love that words can fail.

Did you ever play post office as a child? No, not that post office, the other kind. Sometimes it was called telephone. Where I whisper something to you, and you whisper it to the next person and on and on around the room until it comes back to me. And whodathunkit – when it comes back to me it's not *at all* what I said in the first place!

There are times when I suspect Bible passages have gone through that process. We can't prove, one way or another, that Jesus ever said "I am *the* way" or "I am *a* way." We have to trust that John knew what he was writing, and that he was being as accurate as he could be.

But we also have to remember that each Gospel writer had a theology – and that theology, that system of belief in the holy, would determine what was included, how it was said, how it was presented for future listeners and readers. For John, Jesus is, first and foremost, the divine Christ. And John's deep belief in the divinity of Christ *just might* nuance his writing.

It's all so complicated, isn't it.

I must tell you that I'm pretty much on John's side in terms of theology – but I must also tell you that occasionally I read something in the Gospel and wonder, "Did Jesus really mean that? What *might* he have meant?"

We also have to remember that every translation is interpretation. To take today's Gospel lesson as an example, the Greek word menai is translated "rooms," "dwelling places," and "home" – and which one of those translations is used tells us something about the translator's interpretive stance.

And so that makes it all even more complicated.

But let me simplify. Let me distill the whole message of the New Testament as best I can into three words. Yes, three words only. The *whole New Testament*.

And the words are:

God
is
love.

That's it. Everything in Holy Scripture points to that core belief.

And so when we read the Bible, we need to bring it all back to those three words. If they ring true, trust.

If they don't, if they cause you to question, then start exploring. It's fascinating stuff, Bible study – *really!* And I suspect that your explorations will bring you deeper into your faith and your relationship with the God who has many rooms.

One of them is prepared for you.

Because God is love.