

**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN  
**CHURCH**



SERMON

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# Now It Makes Sense

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This past week the Deacons hosted a gathering at Friendship Village for members and friends of Westminster who live in that community. We delighted at the palpable sense of joy and sharing a few laughs. A series of ice-breaker questions sparked our conversations.

Let me share one: If you could time travel, would you go back in history to engage with your ancestors or, would you choose to witness the lives of your heirs in some future time?

Let me pause for you to consider an answer.

The attendees' responses varied widely. Several immediately spoke of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, wondering how they would blossom. Bright smiles accompanied their curiosity.

Others, sought to learn about their family icons who emigrated to this country. We can only marvel at their courage to leave home, never to return, and venture into the unknown.

One person spoke with reverence of a great, great grandfather who served at Gettysburg as a surgeon. That gave us pause, not wanting to imagine the carnage he must have witnessed from that battle for

human freedom and the unfathomable task to provide healing.

Even as we moved to other ice-breakers, this question of time travel lingered, later prompting a few to lament their children will inherit a landscape they see as filled with frightening technologies, economic uncertainties, and complex cultures.

Will the values we taught them sustain them?

We do not time travel. God gives us only today. It's up to us to fuse the lessons from the past with our hope for the future in how we live today. We are not bound by our mistakes and forced to perpetuate them.

Today's lectionary reading points to the moment in time when Jesus asks the disciples to remember their past as he sends them forward.

On the night before Jesus gives himself to certain death, The Gospel of John tells us that he strips to the waist and stoops far below his disciples, taking their grimy, gnarled feet into his hands. One by one, he washes them.

Imagine the rush of emotions. As he's doing this, they all know that his feet will be pierced the next day. Do

Jesus' tears fall into the basin of water? Maybe their tears mingle as well?

Jesus rises from the floor and says,

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I...have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

(Jn 13:13-15)

Speaking to the one who will betray him, the one who will deny him, and the rest who become dumfounded, he pushes further, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (Jn 13:34)

Now, imagine yourself sitting with your feet dripping wet, shoulder to shoulder with a group of people you did not choose, and listening to the one you believe or believed would save you. And yet, the cross awaits him and potentially you.

Your heart sinks. It almost stops at the prospect of going it alone as this innocent man will be killed for doing what he is asking you to do.

Before I read his words, please pray with me.

*Eternal God,  
Wash away our dust and fear.  
Gather us into your strong arms and  
stoop down to speak to us this day.  
Silence in us all the noise that distracts us and  
startle us with the eternal truth Jesus spoke,  
and his disciples bequeathed to us,  
and bless our thoughts  
so we will bravely walk forward  
to dwell with you. Amen*

### **John 14:1-14**

“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 him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup> Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup> Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

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Jesus’ words confound them at the time, not making a bit of sense as authorities prepare to execute him.

Why not escape? Take up arms to fight? No, that's not the way to God's home.

On this last night of mortal life, Jesus interprets his death and his resurrection. He promises a place in heaven for all, with room for all of those who believe in his way.

When Jesus speaks in John's gospel of believing, he's not arguing for some intellectual assent. "To believe" is to be in a relationship with him and God by the way one lives. It's as if Jesus says, "follow the way and you will always be with me, and with God."

Thomas – the twin who stands in for us – asks, "Where? What way?"

The way is quite simply to continue to do what Jesus did.

For three years Jesus disrupted the norms that segregated and controlled people by politics, religions, culture, tribe, and all the ways we confine one another. All along, Jesus warned that his way demands hard choices.

Like the disciples we'd prefer certain rules to enforce with an omnipotent God at our back and a miracle

worker ahead of us rather than Jesus' corrective to let love shape our lives.

Frustrated, Philip demands: "Just show us God."

Not backing down, Jesus presses, "you've been with me all this time," as if to say, "you saw me feed thousands from mere scraps of fish and bread, calm the raging storms, and raise Lazarus from the dead. You've seen what I do: I bring God's presence to earth."

Now Jesus points them forward:

"I tell you, the one who believes in me  
will do more the works that I do,  
and in fact, will do greater works than these...  
I am going to God and will from there  
I will do whatever you ask in my name."

It must not have made sense: almost all of them abandoned him the next day.

Jesus' words make sense only in the light of the cross and resurrection.

After he shows himself to them in the days and weeks following Easter, they grow to understand. Suffering does not have the last word. God will overcome evil.

When God forms a people with whom the spirit so evidently abides, hope shines through all the fear and anxiety.

They remembered what Jesus said and asked God in his name.

Do you wonder what they asked for? A week later? Years later? Amidst rubble, they saw possibilities. Loners built a beloved community.

Christianity spread like wildfire when no one would have thought the hard work of grace and love could vanquish the grip of Cesar's money and power. By calling on Jesus, they mustered the courage to face their crosses and along the way, they became a force of good. They made their way forward into a world filled with peril and promise.

Now, it's our turn. What we ask of Jesus reveals how powerful we believe God to be. What we ask reveals how we think God's love will help us make sense of the world.

Let's imagine a future with no child ever hungry or without medical care.

Could he guide us to walk gently on this Earth?

Perhaps ask for his presence as rest from the frenetic pace and choose to observe a Sabbath. Resting with God may be the balm to salve so many ills.

We'd stand up for front-line workers who are just trying to do their jobs and yet fall victim of verbal abuse.

Can we ask God for the courage as we seek to stem the gun violence that now kills children more than ever before? Can we protect the innocents?

Let's wonder about a community with neighbors continuing to help neighbors without the vitriol that we'd become accustomed to and change it.

Make a list ... today. What will you ask from Jesus?

A second-century Christian scholar named Aristides offered an understanding of how to believe in God when the world confounds you.

He began looking back and asking who had the proper understanding of God. He dismissed the barbarians who elevated dead warriors and the elements of nature into deities, the Greeks who incorporated salacious myths, as well as the Egyptians who worshipped animals, and the Jews

who—in his judgment—worshipped not only God but also angels (a problematic assumption).

He then came to Christians. Regarding this group of revolutionaries, causing political and social turmoil, this ancient Greek writer might have held to vestiges of Greek philosophy and imagined God as the transcendent Being or First Principle. Instead, he argued that Christians demonstrate their understanding of God by the lives they lead. He said that they were kind, truthful, and loved one another. This is not a rational argument formed from certainties about God. Such confidence in God rises from experiences of being in relationship. Their relationship with Jesus shaped their lives in a way that dignifies humans, they stood confidently in the face of uncertainty to behave morally.

Friends, as we go to the table, we remember Jesus' words, we remember his command to love one another, we remember that our lives flourish when we serve one another.





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