

Rev. Lisa Schrott
May 3, 2026
John 14:1-14
Belief

Our scripture passage this morning is one often shared at memorial services and funerals. This is fitting, as it is a portion of Jesus' farewell discourse, preparing his disciples for what lies ahead after his death. In the previous chapter, John 13, Jesus had shared that he was going to be with them for only a little while longer and that they – the disciples - could not go where he was going – at least not yet. And if that wasn't difficult enough to hear, when Peter questions Jesus as to why he could not join him as he would lay down his life for Jesus, Jesus responds saying, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times." This conversation leaves the disciples distraught, troubled and anxious about their future. Jesus' response is pastoral, reassuring and consoling them, encouraging them to look beyond what is in front of their eyes. So hear now these words of promise from the 14th chapter of Gospel of John as Jesus prepares for his death on the cross:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 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? 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. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 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'? 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. 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. 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. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. **The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God**

Like some of you I suspect, I was completely swept off my feet with delight and awe by the Artemis II flyby mission the moon. I was entranced watching the live coverage of the astronauts as they drew to the closest vantage point to the moon, first person witnesses to

lunar features never before described. One report I read captured the emotion I felt when watching the coverage. It was from BBC, which opened with the line, "Some experiences cannot be processed through rational thought." The report went on to share how the flight commander Reid Wiseman was affected by the moment the Sun passed behind the Moon - an eclipse seen from 250,000 miles away. Wiseman shared that it was "something that overwhelmed the capacity of the human mind. Back on the recovery ship, he sought out the chaplain, needing a way to express what he had experienced that science had not given him. "I'm not really a religious person," he [Wiseman] said, "but there was just no other avenue for me to explain anything or to experience anything. So I asked for the chaplain on the Navy ship... and I broke down in tears. "I don't think humanity has evolved to the point of being able to comprehend what we're looking at right now, because it was otherworldly." ¹

I was reminded of Wiseman's words about the capacity of the human mind to be overwhelmed as I reading this morning's scripture passage. Wiseman and his fellow astronauts Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen had years of study and planning for this trip, studying detailed maps of the lunar surface, working with the top experts in the field, and yet nothing could prepare them for the experience of the rare total solar eclipse as they flew behind the moon. The moon appeared as a "black orb," with the solar corona appearing as a brilliant white halo. Nothing could prepare them for seeing the far side of the moon which is not visible from Earth, of the shifting terminator line, which marks the boundary between day and night, and the magnificent Earth set and Earth rise. Nothing could prepare them for the complete isolation during the 40-minute communications blackout as the Orion spacecraft passed behind the moon. The Artemis crew had to trust and believe that when they passed back out that contact with NASA would be re-established. They had to trust and believe that the intricate technological dance would not miss a step. The NASA administrators had them prepare and prepare and prepare, even though they knew that nothing could truly prepare the astronauts for what lie ahead.

Likewise Jesus knew that nothing could truly prepare the disciples for what lie ahead of them. Nothing could prepare the disciples for the utter despair when Jesus said "It is finished," bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Nothing could prepare the disciples for the confusion of the empty tomb and joy of the post-resurrection appearances. Nothing could prepare them for understanding how the human being they had journeyed with across the miles, had dined with at so many tables, had laughed with and wept with, how this very human Jesus could also be divine, one and the same as the one the disciples knew as Abba, Father. That Jesus was the Messiah, the long awaited savior, and now the one to whom they had pinned their hopes was leaving them. To quote astronaut Reid Wiseman, what lie ahead was something that would overwhelm the capacity of the human mind.

¹ Pallab Ghosht, Alison Francis, Kevin Churchard, Emily Selvadurai. Artemis II crew: 'We left as friends - we came back as best friends'. BBC. 16 April 2026.
https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce8jpx9rx2yo?emc=edit_blv_20260419&nl=believing&segment_id=218459

And yet Jesus still tried. He tried to express in words something that ultimately came down to trust and belief. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ... If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” When the disciple Philip didn’t understand what this meant and asked Jesus to show them the Father, 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’? 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.”

“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.” Jesus knew that language was incapable of truly communicating who he was and what that meant for the disciples in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead. It came down to believing in what the disciples had experienced with Jesus – the relationships they had established with him and with each other and with those who walked alongside them and were healed and forgiven and blessed and formed and reformed into community. And in a beautiful pastoral moment, Jesus tells them that those who put their trust and belief in him “will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”

Rather than being the end of his ministry, Jesus frames his departure as the beginning of something greater than the works he did while walking on the earth. This is a remarkable statement – one that is often overshadowed by other phrases in this text. Sometimes we look at Jesus’ ministry as the apex and us as the appendices. But Jesus puts a different spin on things. A little later in this chapter of John, Jesus says: “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.” Jesus leaves us with the promise of the Holy Spirit and a community is about to be born that will survive so far beyond that of one human lifetime.

As one commentator has noted, Jesus is saying: *“Fear not: I’m leaving, but we’ll still be together. Just keep going toward God in the Way we’ve been traveling, and I’ll be with you — for I am the Way! I am the Divine Logos! As long as you’re going toward God, you’ll be going “through” and with me. ... You know the Way we’ve been traveling, the Truth we’ve been learning, the Life we’ve been living — so just keep going, and when you do, I’ll be right there with you, because I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I’m not merely your guide; I am the Way. So keep going and learning and living toward God, and we’ll be together as you go...”*²

And friends here we are over 2000 years later doing those very works of loving and caring for neighbor that Jesus modeled for us in his ministry. Jesus may not be physically present with

² SALT Project. *SALT Commentary. I Am the Way. Easter 5*. Online at: <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/5/3/i-am-the-way-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-easter-5>

us, and yet his words remain: “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.”

Jesus knew that the movement from being a disciple – one following the witness and teaching of Jesus – to being an apostle – one sent out to minister in God’s name – was not going to be easy for the disciples. They would need to move from observers to practitioners. While Jesus’ the knowledge of Jesus’ teachings was necessary, it would not be enough. Jesus was asking the disciples to believe. To take a risk and be transformed. To trust that he would be with them through the Holy Spirit. “Believe in God; believe also in me”, Jesus says. This belief is active, not a spectator sport. It requires a leap of faith, as 20th century theologian H. Richard Niebuhr states. A move from observation to participation and from observed to lived history,³ as I share in the words of preparation in the bulletin.

This is what we do here at PCO. This is our calling. Our beliefs call us to action in the church, in the community, in the world. It required a leap of faith and deep belief in God’s presence some 62 years when a faithful group of saints chartered the Presbyterian Church of Okemos (or Okemos United Presbyterian Church as it was known then). It required a leap of faith and deep belief in God’s presence 25 years ago when handbells were purchased in honor of loved ones and a bell choir was born. In 2051 when PCO looks back at the 50-year anniversary of the bell choir, what else will the church be celebrating because we took a leap of faith and believed these words: “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.” May it be so. Join me in prayer.

³ H. Richard Niebuhr. *The Meaning of Revelation*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1941 (2006 publication); p 43.