

Gospel reading: John 14:1-14

IN HIS NAME

There is an old preacher's story about a woman who was diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. As she was getting her things in order, she contacted her pastor and asked him to come to her house to discuss some of her final wishes.

She told him which songs she wanted sung at her funeral service, what Scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. She requested to be buried with her favorite Bible.

As the pastor prepared to leave, the woman suddenly remembered something else. "There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" said the pastor.

"This is important," the woman said. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand." The pastor stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say.

The woman explained. "In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, 'Keep your fork.' It was my favorite part of the meal because I knew something better was coming—like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie.

"So, when people see me in that casket with a fork in my hand and they ask, 'What's with the fork?' I want you to tell them, 'Keep your fork. The best is yet to come!'"

Before our gospel reading today, there is this tension between Jesus washing his disciples' feet, the betrayal of Judas, and now Jesus tells them that he is going to a place where they cannot follow him. Peter asks why he cannot go with Jesus and says that he would lay down his life for Jesus. Jesus replies with the prophecy of Peter's denial before the cock crows that next morning. Jesus begins our gospel today with "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid." But troubled hearts is precisely what the disciples are feeling, their friendship with Jesus, this journey with him is now coming to an abrupt halt. But it's not their friendship only, but Jesus' disciples have invested their whole lives in Jesus as the Messiah, the Eternal One, the One who will restore Israel, the One who will begin the reign of God upon the Earth and peace will finally rule.

I saw Robert Fitzpatrick on television this morning who invested all of his money, his family, sold everything and followed the apocalyptic teachings of multi-millionaire Harold Camping. Fitzpatrick was in Times Square in New York City awaiting the rapture that he was convinced was sure to arrive by 6 pm yesterday. When 6 pm came and went, he was devastated, you could see the literal shock on his face and in his whole body. Of course, people taunted him and the whole crowd gathered around were celebrating that the end of the world did not happen, but the extreme disappointment and the crushing of faith in that man's eyes was incredible.

Jesus' disciples have that same look on their face as Robert Fitzpatrick yesterday evening. Jesus is saying goodbye and telling them that they cannot follow him any longer.

Furthermore, Jesus is really sounding like he is going to his death, which can't possibly happen to the Messiah. The Messiah is the champion of the world, the one who is victorious over any power on earth, including death. If the disciples truly believe that Jesus is the Messiah, then nothing can stop him. So why is Jesus saying goodbye?

Jesus replies to all of this anxiety about the future with this statement: "Keep your fork. The best is yet to come!" Which on first pass this statement may seem naïve and Pollyannaish way of looking at the future, but as one gets to thinking, if we truly believe in God and believe that Jesus is the Messiah, then perhaps God has a bigger vision and future than just world-wide domination as in Jesus' disciples, or for us a oft quoted picture of heaven draped in clouds, fortified with pearly gates, turnkey mansions built for us on

the hilltop, and streets paved with gold. Perhaps the dwelling places that Jesus is talking about is more about not saying goodbye and ending a relationship, but that our relationship with God and friendship with Jesus will not end but only transform, in that we will finally get to see the big picture, God's picture and vision of life as we graduate from suke life in this world to the zoe life of the world to come.

As a matter of fact, if you take what Pastor Bill Johnson explained last week where our life without God is suke life, and the life God offers is zoe life, this passage makes more sense. For Thomas is looking for a physical place, a suke place that Jesus is going and everyone in the room is lost, they don't have a GPS to get them to Jesus' destination. So he asks, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus replies with zoe life in mind,

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also." God offers this relationship of zoe life, abundant life, roomy and time-free life through his Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross for all people, not just for some. Jesus is saying in this passage, do not let your hearts be troubled by this sike life, believe in God, and believe also in me that what I have to offer is zoe life, something that you cannot begin to imagine. In other words, "Keep your fork. The best is yet to come!"

Finally, the disciples of Jesus think if Jesus is gone, what shall we do? Jesus replies, "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." If we read in the book of Acts, the disciples of

Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit and tens of thousands of people repent or turn from their sive life and accept God's zoe life in the name of Jesus who died and rose again.

Peter writes that this early church drank pure spiritual milk and built into a great spiritual house using the followers of Jesus as living stones, with Jesus as the cornerstone of the foundation. Today, there are 3.1 billion Christians in the world who glorify the Father by believing in Jesus and following in his steps. Trillions of people over two thousand years have heard the good news of God's grace and accepted the zoe life that Jesus talks about in the scriptures today. But even statistics are human ways that try to quantify the works of Jesus through His Church, for even if only one life is saved, I believe Jesus would say it was worth it all. Zoe life is like that, it is extra-ordinary, super-natural,

and not of this world. Zoe life is non-anxious, full of peace, and overflowing with love.

But many times, we forget the promise of God and live our lives in the name of Jesus, especially when those times have to do with abrupt endings of relationships. My family and I are moving on Friday and it has become incredibly real now to me that our relationship together as pastor and church is coming to an abrupt end on the last day of June. I have felt the high anxiety, the confusion, the disappointment, the anger, and the sense of wondering what shall we do now...much like the disciples in this Upper Room with Jesus. And I say to you as Jesus did, "Keep your fork. The best is yet to come!" Christ will not leave us, you or me, and the best is yet to come. We will graduate into a bigger picture of the church here in Redlands as we are sent

forth by God into new relationships and making disciples so that God may be glorified. These suke temporal changes of address and places of ministry cannot destroy the zoe life God has built together over the last six years. We will see the fruits of our labor as lives are changed from lost to found, blind to seeing, and from death to new life in Christ Jesus. I look forward to hearing about all that God is doing here in the future of University UMC.

Secondly, the anxiety has been raised by all of the deaths that have occurred over the past five or six months. As with Jesus' followers, death has a way of bringing relationships to an abrupt halt, and we look inward at our own mortality and wonder who is next in our family that we get to plan a funeral. There is confusion, a deep feeling of loss, a disappointment that we will no longer see our loved

ones today or tomorrow. So it's hard to hear the words of John 14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled", because death is the worst trouble you can get into, the worst waves that can crash over you. Yet death is something that all of us are going to experience...is all a matter of how and when. It's hard to imagine zoe life of God when the end of our suke life is staring us in the face.

On the other hand, we are still in the season of Easter, and we by faith say that death is not the end, Christ is Risen...He is Risen Indeed! We accept that for our loved ones who have died, God has a bigger vision than what we can see right now, and at this moment they are living that vision, that zoe life, in the fullest sense. Amen? Wow! If you said Amen to that statement, then you have the key of zoe life in your hand that opens the treasure chest of that life in

God which will get you through all of the most terrible circumstances of this mortal life! Therefore, it is true that Easter is the foundation of our faith in God, that because He lives we can face tomorrow with new pastors and new problems, with cancers and divorce and death; because He lives all fear is gone, and we no longer have to worry or be anxious about anything because if God's eyes are on the sparrow, I know He watches me; because I know that God holds the future, God has the bigger vision, that our relationship with God will never end; this life is worth the living, just because He lives! Keep the fork. The best is yet to come! Amen!