

**Deacon Norah Fisher's Sermon for May 3, 2026**  
**John 14:1-14**

A Sunday School teacher asked the children in her class: "How many of you would like to go to heaven?" All of the children raised a hand except one little guy named Derrick. When the teacher asked him why he didn't want to go to heaven, he said, "I'm sorry Mrs. Smith, but my Mommy told me to come home right after church."

Well, like that little boy, heaven is still a hope for most people

Eric Clapton, arguably the greatest living rock guitarist, wrote a heart wrenching song about the death of his four-year-old son (March 20, 1991). He fell from a 53rd-story window. Clapton took nine months off and when he returned his music had changed. The hardship had made his music softer, more powerful, and more reflective. You have perhaps heard the song he wrote about his son's death. It is a poignant song of hope:

Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?  
Would it be the same if I saw you in heaven?  
I must be strong and carry on,  
'Cause I know I don't belong here in heaven.

Would you hold my hand if I saw you in heaven?  
Would you help me stand if I saw you in heaven?  
I'll find my way through night and day,  
'Cause I know I just can't stay here in heaven.

Time can bring you down; time can bend your knees.  
Time can break your heart, have you begging please, begging please.

Beyond the door there's peace I'm sure,  
And I know there'll be no more tears in heaven.

Jesus has just had the Passover meal with his disciples. He has washed their feet in an act of servanthood. He has foretold his betrayal which Judas will soon perform. He has predicted Peter's denial. He has told them he is leaving. But he adds this word of hope: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in

God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you and will come again and take you to myself. So that where I am, you may be also.

Hardship has a way of getting our attention. Pain slows us down. It can even soften us. Very few of us, after facing a trial, come out the same way we entered in. Jesus understood this and attempted to prepare his disciples for the road ahead. He wanted them to know first of all:

If you have faith in me you will overcome your worry. It seems almost impossible doesn't it? Getting rid of worry. But let me tell you it is absolutely essential that we be free of worry. Worry distorts reality. Worry often times leads us to false conclusions.

If you want to be distracted from reality, work yourself up into a good state of anxiety. If Jesus had any concerns it was that his disciples would do exactly that. Let's look at the story. Jesus has just finished having dinner with his disciples. It's early Thursday evening. Jesus has approximately 24 more hours to be with his disciples. He will be crucified the next day after an exhausting evening of arrest, interrogation, and torture. If anyone had reason to worry it was he. But what does he do? He introduces peace. He brings calm to the situation.

He looks at his disciples, who have just watched Judas leave the dinner table on a mission of betrayal, and he says, "Where I am going, you cannot come...but don't let your hearts be troubled." He tells them don't be afraid. At this moment when the tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife, he says there is a haven for troubled hearts within my Father's home. And there is a room for you there.

I love what happens next in John. Look at how Jesus spends the last few minutes he has with his disciples. He calms their fears. Chapters 14, 15, 16, 17 record an after dinner conversation which strengthens their souls. Listen to our Lord's promises:

- First, he says: Yes I am leaving but don't let your hearts be troubled. I am sending the Holy Spirit to help you remember what I have taught you.

- Second, he says, don't have troubled hearts because I leave my peace with you. Not the peace of this world but "my peace."
- Then he says, don't let your hearts be troubled because I am the vine and you are the branches. You will bear fruit as long as you remain in me. Make me the source.
- Fourth, and this is wonderful, he says, I love you. Let me ask you: Have your heard your Lord say that to you? If you have not I want you to hear it this morning.
- Fifth, he is frank with them, he tells them, the world is going to hate you, but don't have troubled hearts about it, you don't belong to the world. Remember they persecuted me first and no servant is greater than his master.
- Next he is honest. He tells them they will grieve when he leaves. But one day... Oh, one day, he tells the, your grief will turn to joy!
- And finally he prays. He prays for himself. He prays for his disciples. And then he prays for you. (Respectively: 14:26, 14:27, 15:5, 15:9, 15:18, 16:20, 17:1, 6, 20)

Isn't that a remarkable after dinner conversation? The gospel of John has 21 chapters and five of them record the events of Thursday night around the dinner table the day before his death. Jesus wants them to be ready, to be calm, to be free of a troubled heart.

He wanted them to know: If you have faith in me you will overcome your worry and, secondly, you will have direction in life.

Now, there are many ways to find direction in life: knowing whom we will marry, what profession we will choose, what monies to put in the retirement plan. These are all important decisions but none are more crucial than the spiritual decisions we make. Who is going to help you make those kinds of decisions?

Karl Barth was lecturing to a group of students at Princeton. One student asked the German theologian "Sir, don't you think that God has revealed himself in other religions and not only in Christianity?" Barth's answer

stunned the crowd. With a modest thunder he answered, "No, God has not revealed himself in any religion, including Christianity. He has revealed himself in his Son."

In no uncertain terms let me say to you this morning that there are three great religions in the world today: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. But there is only one Son of God; only One through whom God has revealed himself and only One whose teachings stand above all others. He is the way, the truth and the life for all men and women.

Finally he wanted them to know: If you have faith in me you will have help along the way. But what kind of help is Jesus talking about? In verse 12 he says that we will be doing great works. In verse 14 he says that all we have to do is ask and he will do it. So who is going to do the work? Me or Jesus?

A well known preacher many years ago, by the name of Leslie Weatherhead, tells a story about himself. When he was a high school student, he had a very difficult examination and he was having trouble studying. Then he had discovered one of our verses here in John 14: "And whatever you ask in my name, I will do it."

He believed the verse meant that all he had to do was ask and he would pass the exam. He told God he believed God's promise, and he wanted a good grade. The next day young Weatherhead took the examination, but when the grades were in, he had failed. He was disillusioned. He rebelled and almost lost his faith. He came to the conclusion that the promises of the Bible were not good - all because God had not granted his wish for a good grade.

The next year he repeated that course. He worked hard, and he passed. This time he decided that he did not need God, that he could get along by himself.

After some years had passed, Dr Weatherhead came to understand that his own powers and abilities were in reality the power that God had given to him. He began to realize that God had already given him the power to pass the examination, but he had not used that power the first go around.

The power is there for us to use. Not the kind of power that bails us out but the kind of help that shapes our lives. The kind of help that says I will strengthen your soul so you learn not to worry when times are tough. The kind of help that doesn't show us the way but rather becomes our way: He is our way; He is our truth; He is our life. The kind of help that doesn't do the good works for us but rather teaches us and strengthens us to use our gifts and talents to do good in the world. Amen.