

## Jesu Juva

“A Different, and Better, Future”

Text: John 14:1-14 (Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60; 1 Peter 2:2-20)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you are old enough, think back in your life - ten, twenty, thirty, even fifty years. What were your plans? How did you think your life was going to turn out? What did you think your life would be like now?

Or if you're not old enough to do that, what are the plans you're making now for your life, for the future? Where do you think you'll be in ten, twenty, or thirty years? What will your life be like?

I remember when I was getting ready to graduate from college, I had plans about what kind of job I would have, what kind of car I would be driving, and how good a runner and golfer I would be! I thought I knew - even more, I thought I could *control* - how things were going to turn out.

And then I did it again. When I wound up going to the seminary instead of having a career in computers, though I didn't know where my church would be, I thought I knew what kind of pastor I would be, what my church would be like, and what positions I would have in district and synod.

And then I did it *again* when I took the call to this congregation, thinking I knew how the church would grow, that we'd have our own building, how successful we would be. I thought I knew - even more, I thought I could *control* - how things were going to turn out.

Now, of course, I see how completely wrong I was! Not only are things very different than what I thought and planned - all along, at all these different points in my life - but *I* am very different. The things I thought important then, the things I wanted, the things I thought I knew, not so much now. So while I am surprised at how different things are than the way I expected them to be, and while I am surprised at how many of those changes took place because of what I would consider unfortunate or terrible or sad events, I am not unhappy that things didn't turn out as I thought and planned. For in many ways they're better - though I would not have thought so while I was making other plans all those years.

I suspect it's that way for all of you who are old enough think back as well, and I suspect it will be that way for all of us who are still trying to plan - *and control* - the future. But maybe, unlike me, you are unhappy and troubled about it. Maybe you don't like where you are now, the situation you're in, how life is turning out. Maybe you're still hanging on to and clinging to the way you thought things would be, and maybe wanting to go back. Still wishing for that control. Still hoping for something different.

Well this is very much like the situation in which the disciples found themselves in the Holy Gospel today. Three years before they were living their lives, working out their plans, and perhaps thinking they had everything under control, *when Jesus came along*. And suddenly all their plans and the way they thought things would be were out the window. They saw things they never thought they would see, they did things they never thought they would do, and they came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

And then they did it again! During the course of those three years with Jesus, they made new plans. They thought about a new kingdom of Israel, they thought about their place in it, they had visions of greatness and who among them would be the greatest! And now that was about to come crashing down as they - in mere hours - would witness Jesus arrested and crucified. And they would be quite unhappy and troubled.

So to them, and to us, Jesus says: ***Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*** Believe not only that God exists, and that Jesus is God in the flesh, come to be our Saviour, but that when it comes to plans and the future, God's plans are the only perfect ones and the only ones that work out perfectly. So ***let not your hearts be troubled*** when things turn out differently than what you hoped, when plans suddenly change, when you realize once again that the control you want isn't the control you have, ***believe in God; believe also in Jesus.*** That He is working. That He is working for your good. That, in fact, the way things are working is going to turn out *better* than your thoughts and plans. Even if it doesn't seem that way. Even if for now, like the disciples, you are quite unhappy and troubled.

For, Jesus goes on to say: ***In my Father's house are many rooms. 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, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.*** This is the future Jesus is working toward. The plans He has for you. That you be with Him in His Father's house, in His Father's kingdom. A house and a kingdom far greater than any we could have or plan for or even imagine in this world.

But the way He is going to do this is quite unexpected: *the way of the cross*. The way for us to be with the Father in His kingdom is through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And that is the *only* way, for as Jesus says: ***I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*** No one comes to the Father except through

Jesus and His death and resurrection for only through Jesus' death and resurrection is our sin forgiven, our death turned into life, and the curse that came from the tree in the Garden undone by the curse of the tree of the cross. Undone, for if Jesus' death on the cross curses the curse and is the death of death, then for us there is no longer curse and death - there is freedom, there is resurrection, and there is life.

So ***let not your hearts be troubled***, Jesus says. This is all according to plan. Not your plan, but God's plan. A *better* plan, though you may not see it that way now.

But like us, the disciples don't want to believe it, they want to *see* it. *Now!* Maybe we're willing to admit that our plans are not always right and don't always work out and that God has a better way, but we still want some control. We still want some say in the matter. So Philip says: ***Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.*** This is even more than Thomas, who just wanted to see *the nail holes* in Jesus' hands and feet and side in order to believe. Philip wants to see *the Father* in order to believe. *That's all.* That's enough for us, Philip says!

What is it that you want to see in order to believe? What do you think would be enough for you?

But Jesus responds: ***Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*** Jesus really is God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. One substance with the Father. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - three persons yet one God. United perfectly in thought and word and action. Jesus shows us the Father and the Father is seen in Jesus, the Son. You want to see God and the love of God and the works of God and hear the Word of God? See and hear Jesus. He is the way to the Father and the Father's way to us. And the way to the Father and the Father's way to us is the cross. There is the **love** of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - for you as you see what God is willing to do for you. There is **forgiveness** of God for you as Jesus bears the burden of your sin instead of you. There is the **life** of God for you as Jesus' death is the death of your death. In that most unlikely place, then, that plan we never would have thought of, that place we never could have imagined, is the way of our future with God.

Which means that when the cross is a reality in your life now, when there is suffering and things take quite an unexpected and (maybe in your opinion) terrible and horrible turn . . . ***let not your hearts be troubled.*** The cross is still your way to the Father and the Father's way to you. Through Jesus. To work in you repentance - that you not cling to your idols of the future or of the past; that you not cling to the idol of whatever control you want or think you need; that you not cling to the idol that what you see you can to believe - but repent and trust in your Saviour. Trust that He is working for your good. Trust in His forgiveness and life. Trust that He is working toward a future *even better* than you could ever have imagined.

And that's what Jesus says in the conclusion of these verses with these amazing words about the future: ***Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.***

That's a future quite different than we usually think of! But Jesus' ***going to the Father*** through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead is what makes all the difference in the world. Jesus' ***going to the Father*** means that now His work is being done not just in one place by one man but all over the world, every place His Name is confessed. Every Baptism in His Name, every Absolution in His Name, every preaching in His Name, every Supper in His Name, every prayer in His Name powerful and effective.

Now, when I was growing up, my plans were all about making a name for myself. Maybe you too? But how much better - for us and for others - to, as Jesus said, ***glorify the Father in the Son***. To make a difference **in His Name**. To work His works in your family, in your neighborhood, and wherever life takes you. And maybe it won't seem like much compared to the great plans you had for your life! But this is better, and greater. To love, to forgive, to serve, to lay down your life in His Name. *Like Stephen*, as we heard in the first reading from Acts. No greater works could you do than these. And if it's tough, if it's not quite what you expected or planned, ***let not your hearts be troubled***. Believe. Trust. The God of the cross works in most unexpected places, through most unexpected means, by most unexpected ways, at most unexpected times, and in most unexpected people. But *all* that you and all people have life in His Name.

On that cornerstone you can rely and be sure. For now and for whatever the future holds. For, as Peter said, ***whoever believes in him will not be put to shame***. Which means that though your life turn out quite different that you think or want or planned, Jesus will never let you down. Your faith in Him will never be put to shame. He will do as He has promised. Which we know because the God of the cross is the God of the empty tomb. Because *Christ is risen!* [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] And He lives *for you*.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.