

THE GOD WHO WILL ALWAYS BE THERE
John 14:1-14

There's a popular phrase that I began hearing probably 10 years ago, "I have abandonment issues." Some people, because of traumatic things that happened to them in childhood, have a greater-than-normal fear of being abandoned by people. They're never sure if they can trust you. Tragically, sometimes that fear can be a self-fulfilling prophecy- everyone they meet they say, 'I know you'll abandon me at some point, so I'm not going to even let myself be vulnerable.' And when the other person feels shut out, they leave- and the cycle repeats itself.

The only way people seem to get over abandonment issues is by, first dealing with the past, but then also entering into a relationship where they're shown unconditional love and they experience someone who won't leave.

Let's set the scene of the Last Supper from which our passage comes: Jesus has reached a height of popularity in his ministry. The religious authorities are beginning to make plans to silence Him. Jesus senses this and begins to hide Himself away until Passover. And then He marches into the center of religious activity, Jerusalem, on the back of a donkey while the whole town turns out to either welcome Him or watch Him.

His disciples are scared. It's a tense time, full of unknowns. Jesus does three very surprising things- He washes their feet (something no one but the lowest servant would have done), predicts one of them will betray Him and one will deny Him. *What is going on?* They must be thinking. Jesus had been predicting his death, He knew it was coming. He was the one who would soon be abandoned. He was the one who needed encouragement, yet He's the one who has to encourage the others.

And so He begins to really teach them. A talk that would have forced a re-write of every systematic theology books of the time. But this is not a dry theology lecture- it's more like a cross between the rallying speech in *Braveheart* and the calm bedside chat of a father re-assuring his child that he can sleep peacefully.

Jesus begins by offering two startling revelations: that He is their **God** and He is their **husband**. (Did you just say husband? I told you Jesus was full of surprises) He's going to give them comfort through these 2 relationships.

Jesus' divinity gives us comfort

In verse 1 He says, "Don't let your hearts be troubled." Have you ever wanted to tell someone this? Every time I make a hospital visit I want to. This is a very comforting thing to say- if you can help. But it doesn't really help if you have nothing on which to base it. Jesus does give them something to base their peace of mind on: "Believe in God; believe also in me." Now, this is a ridiculous claim if Jesus is just a man. But if He's God, well that recasts this whole conversation, doesn't it?

Some people will tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God- and it's true that Jesus never stood up and said "I am Yahweh." But He said it 100 other ways, from "Before Abraham was, I am" to calling Himself the "Son of Man"- a divine title from the Old Testament. In verse 9, Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus is making another divine claim, saying that He's so enmeshed with the Father that they represent one another. Because they *are* One.

This is much more than just a resemblance. Some of you know that I have a twin brother. I could say, “Whoever has seen me has seen my brother.” But not really. Knowing me doesn’t mean you really know my brother. We’re very different and at this point in our lives and we pursue different goals and represent different interests. I don’t speak for Him, and he’s not my authority.

But Jesus was God the Father’s mouthpiece- the image of the invisible God. He spoke with authority, because He has all authority! He is also the ‘gatekeeper’ to heaven- No one comes into the Father’s presence without Jesus. Now that’s comfort- the God of the universe has come down to sit among you and to tell you He’s going to take care of you.

But, in order to really give us hope, we need Jesus to be more than just divine. Strength and power by themselves can be just plain scary. This is the difference between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort, right? Both are very powerful, but one acts out of fear and a need to control, while the other acts out of love.

Jesus’ love gives us comfort

In verse 2 Jesus makes that enigmatic statement, ‘In my Father’s house are many rooms...if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself;’ Now, what’s Jesus talking about? Is He talking about being some kind of heavenly housekeeper? Is He going to put clean towels out? Is he going to put out a flower arrangement? Maybe knit an afghan for us?

Listen to what Rob Bell (author of *Sex God*) tells us about a Jewish ritual that every man in that room would have been very familiar with: “In the first century, generally a young woman would be married in her early teens, often at thirteen or fourteen. It would become known that she was now ‘of age’ and her father would entertain offers from the fathers of young men who were interested in marrying her. If the fathers agreed on the terms of the marriage, there would be a celebration to honor the couple and announce their engagement. At this celebration, the groom would offer the young girl a cup of wine to drink. But she doesn’t have to drink it. She can reject the cup. She can say no to his offer of marriage...

But if she takes the cup and drinks from it, that only means that they are engaged. They aren’t married yet. Something still has to happen. Or to be more precise, something has to be built. If she says yes, then the groom goes home and begins building an addition onto his family’s home. This is where he and his bride will start their new family together. And so he works and works and works, building a place that they can call home. And here’s the interesting part: he doesn’t know when he’s going to finish. Because he doesn’t have the final say on whether it’s ready. That’s his father’s decision. And so his father periodically inspects his work, looking to see if the quality of what the son is building properly honors his future bride...

The future bride is at home, learning how to run a household. She also doesn’t know when the work will be done, so she’s preparing herself for a date that’s coming, she just doesn’t know when. And then the day comes. The father inspects and tells the son that it’s time. So the son gets his friends, and they set out for her house....And so he goes to get her, and they gather their friends and family, and there’s a giant procession back to his house, where the party starts.”

When we understand the cultural background, the metaphor Jesus is using becomes clear: He's saying that His love is a love that the greatest love, married love, can only point to. As it turns out, the promise of eternal life is really the promise of eternal love.

I do a lot of weddings. There is one factor that gives me peace of mind about the marriage above all the other factors: the groom is *serious about loving this woman* (it seems to never be a problem for the girl). You can tell from the pre-marital counseling whether he's ready to die for her or whether he's just going through with this for whatever reason.

Jesus is the great Lover who will pursue His bride, the Church, to the ends of the earth. Does that sound overly romantic? Too sentimental? The love of God goes much deeper than romance. And yet, it can also make up for a loss of romantic love. It's not so much that if you lose your spouse, that you won't need or desire another spouse. But if you have the love of Christ, you won't be consumed by your loss. This kind of love can also heal wounds from parents and close friends. If God's love defines you, their words or actions won't define you.

Another result of getting the love that Jesus is offering is that you start loving people more freely- and not needing to get love back in return. You find yourself no longer asking what others can do for you, or how they view you. You realize you already have as much love as you could ever need.

I had a friend in college who thought he could woo a young woman with a strong display of affection (I'm pretty sure he wanted to sleep with her, he just said he wanted to 'get to know her'). He got her flowers, he wrote her letters, he even told her he was going to be sick and depressed if she wouldn't return his affection. While she was patient and kind, he realized that she was tough, she wasn't going to just give in to him like that. So he gave up. You see, she wasn't needy- she was secure in the love of Another, and if she were led to the right man, it would happen in the right way- not through emotional manipulation.

This is something our young women need- to know they are loved and accepted in an ultimate sense, and so they don't have to fall for the traps of slick young men. Young ladies, here's a good question of potential husbands: "Is he like Jesus? Could he offer care and encouragement like Jesus does here?"

That's something that we all need: to realize that we have a relationship that gives us everything. Jesus gives us what we need now- "Don't let your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in me. And He will take care of us into eternity- "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself." Friends, be encouraged, there is no abandonment in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Some of the resources I used for this John series were *The Farewell Prayer and Final Discourse of Jesus* by D.A. Carson and *Volume 4 of The Gospel of John* by J.M. Boice, as well as various other resources. As usual, the reader should assume that little, if any, of this material is truly original.