

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

John 14:15-21

"The underlying Greek word which is translated into English as 'truth' is alethea. In Greek, an initial letter 'a' is like our English 'un.' Lethe is the river in Greek mythology that the dead drank from in Hades in order to forget their past. And so 'a-lethea' - truth - has the sense of: waking up; remembering; overcoming oblivion and stupor; being alive and vital; not being deceived by false ideas or desires or scams; SEEING what is as it actually is."

Listed on The Text This Week, www.textweek.com: Contemporary Commentary, Studies, and Exegesis for the Gospel reading.

Year A

Season of Easter

Easter 6

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [John 14:15-21, The Message](#) or [John 14:15-21, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click here, [John 14:15-21](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "[Who Are You Going To Serve?](#)"

This passage continues from last week's reading, and is part of Jesus' final speech to his followers before his arrest, trial, torture, and brutal execution.

It follows the classic form of a farewell speech: addressing the survivors' needs and fears; giving instructions for their future behaviour; giving glimpses of the otherwise-unseen-but-present other world, and of immediate future events.

It is also very typically non-linear.

John's reporting of Jesus is not concerned with "history:" what Jesus actually said; where he went; who he met; etc., etc. John wants us to **SEE** Jesus for who he really is. And the kind of **SEEING** that John is meaning requires adapting a sideways glance - finding the crack in everything (a la Leonard Cohen). That is why John's reporting of Jesus is so convoluted and confusing to us: he repeats and circles around; confounding our linear "seeing" so that we might really **SEE**.

Aside: For more on this see my note (no pun intended) [Seeing Jesus](#).

Verse 15. This should **NOT** be read with a finger-wagging, stern warning tone of voice. This is more a statement of plain common sense logic. What is the commandment? "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) So this verse reads:

If you love me, you will keep my commandment to love one another as I have loved you.

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Verse 16. Since Jesus is about to leave them, Jesus now promises that he will ask God, and God will send them a helper, the Spirit of truth. The "world" cannot "SEE" this spirit, because it has not "seen" Jesus. This Spirit will abide in us as Jesus abides in us. It is a Spirit of truth.

*Aside: The underlying Greek word which is translated into English as "truth" is alethea. In Greek, an initial letter "a" is like our English "un." "Lethe" is the river in Greek mythology that the dead drank from in Hades in order to forget their past. And so "a-lethea" - truth - has the sense of: waking up; remembering; overcoming oblivion and stupor; being alive and vital; not being deceived by false ideas or desires or scams; **SEEING** what is as it actually is.*

This verse and the following ones require us to remember that a crucial stress in John is that of abiding. Jesus abides in the Father, the Father in Jesus, Jesus in his followers, his followers in him, the Spirit in them, etc., etc. This means that when it comes to love, Jesus, God, the Spirit, and his followers are all inter-changeable terms.

For example, if Jesus is abiding in you, and I love you as Jesus loves me, then I am loving Jesus (who is abiding in you).

So once again, **Verse 21**, should not be read as an exclusivist, finger wagging, reward and punishment, statement, but of simple common sense logic:

"They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me"

means

"They who love one another as I love them are those who love me (who is abiding in everyone.)"

And

"those who love me will be loved by my Father"

means

"those (in whom I abide) who love me will be loved by my Father (who loves me and therefore also loves those in whom I abide).

For more on the quality of "love" as it is used in the Bible, see my note [How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count The Ways.](#)

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Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John, see link below, pages 229-232.

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* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

John 14:15-21 (NRSV)

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

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John 14:15-21 (The Message)

¹⁵ "If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. ¹⁶ I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. ¹⁷ This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take him in because it doesn't have eyes to see him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be in you!

¹⁸ "I will not leave you orphaned. I'm coming back. ¹⁹ In just a little while the world will no longer see me, but you're going to see me because I am alive and you're about to come alive. ²⁰ At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in my Father, and you're in me, and I'm in you.

²¹ "The person who knows my commandments and keeps them, that's who loves me. And the person who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and make myself plain to him."

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