

John 14:23-29

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Once again we have a small excerpt selected from a much longer, richer, and more complex passage which is the whole of Chapter 14.

These verses are part of an address by Jesus to his followers (then and now) on why they should not let their hearts be troubled (Verses 1 and 27) even though he is about to leave them.

The Chapter consists of three exchanges in the pattern: Jesus explains why they should not let their hearts be troubled; one of the disciples (Thomas, then Philip, then Judas (not Iscariot)) misunderstands; Jesus adds further clarifications.

The text for today follows the question / misunderstanding by Judas (not Iscariot) who asks, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?"

In his response Jesus repeats the theme of verse 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.

This response needs to be understood as John trying to describe the organic unity - the interconnected relatedness - of Jesus and his followers. To be a follower is to have and keep Jesus' commandments / teachings; to keep Jesus' commandments is to love him; to love Jesus is to also be loved by Jesus; to be loved by Jesus is to also be loved by the one who loves Jesus - his Father; to be loved by Jesus and the Father is to abide in them; to abide in them is to keep Jesus' commandments. (And remember that here "love" means fully devoted compassion.)

There are probably at least 3 ways to misunderstand John.

One is to treat each of the above (following, loving, abiding) as if they were separate and distinct pieces. These things are all of a whole; you cannot selectively choose only one part: "I'll have the love of Jesus please, but hold the keeping the commandments."

Another is to treat these as a linear progression: first you follow, then you love, then you abide. In John, the organic, inter-connected relatedness of our relationship with Jesus means that these things are fully present at all times. It's true that one may be more prominent at any given time, but all are always present and operative.

Another is to focus on "keeping my commandments" in a blind obedience, totalitarian way. The holistic, organic unity of inter-connected relatedness is total, but it is not totalitarian. Our freely voluntary participation is essential to John's vision.

Another (I think this actually makes 4 ways to misunderstand John), is to focus on John's polarizing, either/or language. Either you love me or you don't. Either you are fully and completely my follower or you are fully and completely estranged. This aspect of John's vision is partly result of his circumstances in which his community was under attack and persecution; you either were a fully devoted, loyal participant of John's community or you were a danger to the community. This historical context does not need to be repeated, and does not have any theological significance for understanding John.

And the polarizing language is also partly a result of the organic vision of John; an egg is either fully and completely part of the batter or it isn't. But again, this holistic vision should not be interpreted in totalitarian, hostile ways. A better way to understand this aspect of John is to ask, "What part of me / our community is not fully participating in the way of Jesus? What healing / correction / guidance would help to deepen greater participation?"

Inter-connected, organic relatedness may have a certain cache in these days of concern about global climate change, but for anyone considering joining the community of Jesus' followers, it also presents the

somewhat daunting reality that this is not a part-time, weekend commitment. Everything comes as a complete package and so our experience of any part will only be as rich as our experience of the part we least participate in.

The response to Judas (not Iscariot) ends with the promise in verse 26, that after Jesus is no longer with them, the Holy Spirit will be sent to continue to teach and remind them of everything. This assures them that they will not be abandoned and left on their own for the crucial aspect of "having and keeping my commandments." (Interestingly, this is also given as the reason John has written his gospel. See John 20:30-31.)

Verses 27-31 conclude the Chapter with final comments by Jesus on "do not let your hearts be troubled." First, Jesus leaves and gives his peace; leaves and gives all that they need for their total well-being: truth, light, love, teachings, his way. Second, we should be happy that Jesus is going to be with his Father. Third, by telling us what is going to occur in advance, we may be confident that the ruler of this world actually has no power over Jesus; what is about to happen is because Jesus is keeping his Father's commandment (and thereby showing his love). In other words, Jesus will be living the organic unity - the inter-connected relationship he has with his Father. And therefore we should not be troubled, but rather, be confident and loyal and live the organic unity - the inter-connected relationship Jesus offers his followers.

David Ewart
www.holytextures.com