

The Gospel Is Good News

John 14:1-7

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Craig Coulbourn

[Wayne Koch:] Well, it's my privilege and joy to introduce now our speaker for the morning. The elders of the church welcome Craig Coulbourn to our pulpit. Craig's not a stranger to many, but he is to some. He says every time he comes back, there are more new faces, and that's as it should be. Craig and his wife Ree were long-term members in our church. Craig was a deacon, and then an elder, and then was called to Japan as full-time missionaries, where they have served in various churches now at the Shin-Urayasu Grace Church, which they have helped plant. Craig's a teaching elder in the Presbyterian church in America, and we're looking forward to what he has for us this morning. Craig is also the father of four children. Hannah has been worshipping with us and is a member here, and Mary also, their older son, Daniel, and Andrew, who I had the privilege of hearing recite the catechism a couple of years ago. So, proud parents of a great group of kids. Craig?

[Craig Coulbourn:] Good morning, everyone. It's always a delight to come here. You know, thirty-two years ago we walked into this—it wasn't here, of course—but we walked into a gathering of this congregation as a young, engaged couple. This morning we walked in with another engaged couple who will be getting married in a few weeks. And, you know, this is our spiritual home. We came here as very young Christians and grew tremendously during our years here. CPC has been a great blessing to us personally, and then CPC has been a great blessing to us in sending us out to Japan.

You might be surprised to know, it's also very hard for us to come here. And that's because there's so many of you here that we want to talk to, and we have just this very short amount of time, and we get this little part of a conversation with lots of people, but we can never finish a conversation with anybody. And so it's kind of hard to come here as well. Not only that, but as Wayne said, every time we come there are new people, and we want to get to know those of you who are new, and we never have enough time to do that. So while we love to come here, it's always kind of frustrating to come here as well, because there's so much we can't do in the short time that we have.

We're back for six months now. We came back in April. We'll be here until late October. And I think our new pattern is going to be to come back for six months, now that I am heading up a church plant in Japan. It's a little harder to be gone. We used to come back for a year, but it's hard to be gone for that long now. So I think we're going to come back for six months at a time from now on. Our plan is to see maybe half of our supporting churches each time. Of course, we'll see CPC every time. But you might remember, we came back two years ago for three months. That was when Mary started college. And because of that, we didn't see half of our churches last time. So this time we're seeing more than half of our churches. And so part of the reason you're not seeing very much of us is because we're making up for that short home assignment last time with a more intense home assignment this time. But our hope is that this is the only time that's going to be the case. And when we come back in the future, there will be off Sundays and time where we can just come and be with you and not need to be up front—just spend time with you, fellowshiping with you.

I've chosen John chapter 14:1-7 as our passage tonight—today. It's tonight in Japan, I suppose. Was that smooth to get out of that? Anyway, before we read it, let's pray to God.

Father, we thank you that you've given us your Word. We are a people who need your Word. We need what you give us in your Word. We need what your Word tells us about you, so that we can know you and that we can walk in relationship with you. We need what your Word tells us about how we can live to please you, so that we can be your children and be children in whom you delight. And we need

your Word to tell us about the way that you open for us to become your children through the work and the life of Jesus Christ. And so we pray, as we read this Word this morning, that you'll speak to us through it and that you will give us ears to hear, that you'll give us hearts which are quick to believe, and that you'll strengthen us in our inner man, that we might walk according to your Word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay. The passage is John 14:1-7.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

The gospel is good news. When the Bible tells us about the life and the work of Jesus Christ, it's telling us good news. In fact, the meaning of the word “gospel” is good news. Our modern English word “gospel” comes from the old English word “godspell.” That word is a combination of two words: “God,” which means good, and “spell,” which means news or story. The Greek word translated “gospel” in the New Testament also means good news. That word is εὐαγγέλιον (*euaggelion*), from which our English word evangelism is derived. The prefix, eu, means good, and the main part of the word, aggelion, means news or a message. And even the Japanese word for gospel, ゴスペル (*gosuperu*), has the same meaning. The first part, go, means happy or fortunate, and the second part, superu, means a sound or a report.

In our twenty years in Japan, we've had many opportunities to open the Bible with Japanese people. And Japanese people find many things that they like in the Bible. For example, they love the golden rule—so in everything, do unto other as you would have them do unto you. They like the second greatest commandment—love your neighbor as yourself. But verse six of today's passage isn't always so well-received—“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” Many Japanese find this exclusive claim of Jesus to be distasteful. There's a well-known Japanese proverb that says that there are many paths to the top of Mount Fuji. And so for many Japanese, the idea that there's only one way is difficult to accept. Japan is called the land of eight million gods. And so the idea that there's only one God is contrary to what these people have been taught.

I know that in recent years, you also, more and more, meet resistance to the exclusive claims of Jesus right here in the United States. Our culture is becoming more and more intolerant of the idea that there's only one way to God. However, if we look at what Jesus has said in these passages, we'll see that these very claims are the heart of what makes the gospel good news.

Jesus said, “I am the way.” That's good news. Our first question is, the way to what? Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus is the way to the Father. Well, why is that good news? It's good news, because our way to the Father has been blocked by our sin. Each of us has broken God's law, either by doing what God has commanded us not to do, or by not doing what God has commanded us to do. Each of us has disregarded God's authority over us by doing as we ourselves thought best, and by living as if God didn't matter. And so, as a result, our relationship with him was broken. We were alienated from him. We need to be reconciled to the Father.

The words in today's passage were spoken by Jesus in order to comfort his disciples. In the preceding chapter, Jesus had told them that he would be going away. In John 13:33, he said, “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now. Where I am going, you cannot come.” The idea that Jesus would be going away was upsetting to the

disciples, but Jesus wanted them to know that his going away was for their good. Starting in verse two of today's passage, he said to them, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." When Jesus went away, he would prepare a place for them, and then he would come back to take them to be with him. It was by his going away, by his death on the cross, by his resurrection from the dead, and by his ascension to the right hand of the Father, that Jesus would open the way for sins to be forgiven and for sinners to be reconciled to God.

It was our great joy in this past term in Japan to see a lady named Naoko find Jesus to be the way to the Father. Naoko, when her youngest son was a kindergarten student, in her son's class was another boy who was from a Christian family. And Naoko and the mother of that boy became very close throughout the time in kindergarten. In fact, they became so close that they remained friends even after their sons finished kindergarten and went to different elementary schools. When Shin-Urayasu Grace Church began worshipping in March 2012, the mother of that other boy began to attend worship there. And not long afterward, she invited Naoko to a Bible study that was being held at the church.

Looking back, Naoko says that when she started attending that Bible study, she didn't really understand very much that she was reading in the Bible. And I remember when I was first reading the Bible, it was the same for me. I didn't understand much of what I was reading, either. But the environment in the Bible study was very warm, and quickly Naoko felt a freedom to share from her heart. She said that even as she began to understand what she was reading in the Bible, she didn't think that she could become a Christian. She was a Buddhist. But God's Word does not return empty. It accomplishes the purpose for which he sends it. And after some time, the Holy Spirit began to work in Naoko's heart to convince her that the things that she was reading in the Bible were true. Soon, she wasn't praying to Buddha anymore. She was praying to the one true God. And she was seeing answers to her prayers. After studying the Bible for a little over two years, Naoko decided that she was ready to be baptized and to trust in Jesus as her Savior. God had shown her over those two years and that she needed to be forgiven, and she turned to Jesus as her way to be reconciled to the Father. And so Jesus was her way to the Father.

Many times, after a person becomes a Christian, they begin to see their sin much more clearly than they did before. As they grow to know God more deeply, they see that their character is much different than his holy character. Have you experienced this in your life? I certainly have, many times. Earlier in her Christian life, Naoko also experienced this, and she was very discouraged by it. But she found what many Christians have also found—that Jesus continues to be the way to the Father. God has begun a good work in us, but that work isn't finished yet. Even as Christians, we continue to stumble and to fall into sin, and Jesus continues to reconcile us to the Father when we fall, by his once for all sacrifice for our sins. And so whether we're just realizing that we're alienated from God, or whether we grieve that we still fall into sin even though we've already believed the gospel, Jesus is our way to the Father, and that's good news.

Jesus said, "I am the truth," and that's also good news. Why is it good news that Jesus is the truth? It's good news, because we have an enemy who want to deceive us and to keep us alienated from God. The Bible warns us, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour," 1 Peter 5:8. The devil wants us to believe things that are not true. He wants to deceive us about the way to true happiness. If I could just have that, then I would be happy. If I could only do this, then I would be happy. And the devil wants to deceive us about how we ought to live. One of the most common deceptions that I face is the temptation to believe that I'm justified in doing something because of what somebody else has done to me. But did you notice what the devil's goal is? He wants to devour us. By false ideas about what will make us happy, he's seeking to devour us. By wrong choices about what's acceptable for us to do, he's seeking to devour us. But Jesus is the truth.

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free," John 8:31-32. Jesus teaches the truth, and Jesus lives according to the

truth. And so by his words and by his example, Jesus shows the truth to us who are so easily misled from without and from within. And that's good news.

I've gotten to know a man in Japan. As a child, he was mistreated by another person, and now, years later, he still carries a great deal of anger towards this person. Now, please don't misunderstand what I'm about to say. The mistreatment was real, and it shouldn't be minimized. And the resulting pain was real, and true harm was done to this man. But his anger is consuming him. He takes every opportunity to lash out at the person who mistreated him. The devil is whispering in his ear, you will only be free when you have repaid the person who mistreated you. It's okay for you to humiliate this person who's done this to you. And sadly, the devil's scheme seems to be working. This man is enslaved by his anger and his pain. He's being devoured.

Jesus knows what it is to be mistreated. Though he came to this earth to bring blessing, he was rejected and treated with contempt. The one who was mistreated speaks a message of truth to this man that I know. Revenge won't set you free. Only being forgiven, and forgiving as you have been forgiven, will set you free. Only God's grace will stop your pain. I've had the opportunity to share a gospel truth with this man. Please join me in praying that he'll receive it and find healing for his injured heart through Jesus, who is the truth. If you'd be willing to pray for this man, talk to me after the worship service and I'll tell you his name.

Jesus said, "I am the life," and this is good news as well. It's good news, because death is something that we all will encounter. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. Each of us have sinned against God, and so each of us has already experienced the spiritual death which the Bible speaks about when it says, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live," Ephesians 2:1-2. And unless Jesus comes back first, each of us will also experience physical death.

Since we began the new church-planting work in Urayasu four years ago, I've known a number of people who were facing death. I've had to learn many Japanese medical words, and especially words related to cancer. I had the opportunity to share the good news of the gospel with a man who died thirty minutes later. He was no longer able to speak. But my prayer is that he made that good news his own. I know a Christian man who's faced the ups and downs of a long battle with cancer with faith and with peace of heart. His example has been an inspiration to me and to many others. And I know a man who's been desperate to try anything—even some not very good things—in his anguish over his uncertain health and future.

We often try to soften our fears of death by telling ourselves that death is natural, but it's not true. Adam and Eve were created with perfect bodies. Death was not inevitable for them. They were made to live forever, but just as God had warned Adam, death came into our world as a consequence for disobedience to God's commands. And now our bodies are able to get sick and to be injured and to die. Death is not natural. Its threat can't be softened. It's not without reason that the Bible calls death "the last enemy."

But Jesus is the life. Jesus is the bread of God who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. He came to give new spiritual life to those of us who were dead in our transgressions and sins. "But because of his great love, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions." We've been born again, and now we can walk in a living relationship with our Creator.

And Jesus came to give us eternal life. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die," John 11:25-26. Jesus rose from the dead, and when he did so, he opened the way so that those who trust in him can overcome death and can live with him forever in the place which he has prepared, and that's good news.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Far from being an intolerant or a distasteful statement, this is wonderful good news. There's a way to be reconciled to the Father, and we can take it. There's truth, and we can know it. There's life, eternal life, and we can have it. And did you notice that the good news of the gospel is a person? Jesus is the way. Jesus is the truth. Jesus is the life. It's through knowing and trusting in Jesus that this good news becomes ours.

The gospel is good news for us. If you're trusting in Jesus, you are reconciled to God. You know the truth which will guide you in your life and will protect you from being deceived, and you have eternal life. You have much to rejoice about. And so, enjoy it, and give God thanks for it.

But the gospel is not only good news for us. It's good news for others as well. Now, don't misunderstand me—it is for us. God gives these blessings for us, and he wants us to enjoy them. But he doesn't want us to keep them for ourselves. He wants us to share them with others as well. It's always that way when God blesses people. Remember his promises to Abraham? God told Abraham, I will bless you. But he also told him, you will be a blessing. He told Abraham, all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. The blessings which God would pour out on Abraham were to overflow through him to others, and it's the same with you. God has richly blessed you. Those blessings are for you, and God wants you to enjoy them, but God also wants those blessings to overflow through you to others as well.

And so, who is there around you who needs to be reconciled to God? Who do you know who needs the truth of Jesus to guide them and to protect them? Who is there who needs to overcome death and to receive eternal life? There are people in your family, at your school, in your neighborhood, at your workplace, who God wants to bless through you. And there are people all around the world who need those blessings as well. Many of them may not know a single Christian who can tell them about Jesus. But our blessings can overflow to these people as well. We can send Bibles, and we can send witnesses, so that these people as well can know the way, the truth, and the life. And so my encouragement to you is to ask God, how do you want to use me to bless others as you have blessed me? The gospel is good news. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Thank you, God, for blessing us with this good news. Please, God, use us to bless others with this good news as well. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you sent Jesus, because we needed a way. We needed truth. We needed the life. And so thank you that you've sent Jesus to bless us with all those things—to richly bless. And we gratefully, gratefully receive those blessings from him. And we pray that you would open our eyes, that we might see around us those who need those blessings as well. Give us eyes to see the people that you put in our lives, and give us courage and faith to be a vessel of your blessing in the lives of those people as well. We pray that you'll use us for your glory, and we pray that we will rejoice in not only the blessings that you have given us, but also in the opportunity to serve you by being a vessel through whom those blessings can flow to others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.