

Children's Moment *Which way?*

Good morning, boys and girls.

I hope you made something for your Mom last week and gave it to her. If you didn't, that's okay. You can still do it today. Your Mom will love anything you give her on any day.

Do you like to play games? I do. One game I've played is Jenga.

Have you ever played Jenga? If you haven't, maybe someone can show you how. The rules are simple. You stack a bunch of blocks with three in each layer. Then you take turns pulling blocks out and putting them on top. The goal is to make the stack as tall as you can without knocking it over. You should try it – it's fun.

What do we learn by playing Jenga? For one thing, it's fun to play games with other people. Another is that it isn't always easy to work together, but it's worthwhile when we do. One thing you find out is that there are a lot of ways to play the game. You can stack blocks in lots of different ways, but you always have to have a firm foundation.

Your lives are the same way. Each of you is a gift. You are different from all the other girls and boys. We all live different ways. We dress differently. We have different friends. We have different kinds of houses and cars.

But we need a firm foundation. We need someone who is stable and loving to help us and care for us. Our parents, especially our Moms, do that. Some parents are good at caring for kids. Other parents aren't as good at caring for their children.

Jesus is always good at caring for kids. He likes ALL kinds of kids, young and old, good and bad, those who are good in school and those who don't do as well. It doesn't matter to him. You ALL are good to him. He loves you just the way you are!

Hold onto Jesus. Invite him to be with you. Be his friend. When you do, you're going to have more fun, work better with others and care for other people, no matter how different they are.

Let's pray ...

Message: "Do You Know the Way?"

Judy Nordell shares her story:

"All the wedding guests stood as the bride made her entrance. Judy looked over at a woman across the aisle. She'd noticed her at the bridal shower, but never got around to introducing - or was it reintroducing, herself? The woman looked so familiar Judy could swear she'd met her before. Something about her

Of course! The woman had hardly changed in the 25 years since their brief encounter. Judy was walking in the park with her infant nephews. A stranger stopped and looked in the carriage.

'Twins!' she said. 'Are they yours?'

'They're my nephews,' Judy said. Then she surprised herself by adding, 'I can't have children.'

Children were all Judy thought about in those days. She'd been married nearly eight years and trying to have a baby almost that long. After many tests, doctors told her it wasn't going to happen. The adoption agency said they were in for a long wait. But none of this was something a stranger needed to know!

The woman didn't seem at all uncomfortable by her confession. Only kind. 'I'll pray for you,' she said.

Judy says, 'Her words were a comfort. But I was shocked when - only two weeks later - I found out I was pregnant. That was some prayer! My son, now 25, grew up hearing the story of the woman who prayed for him to be born.'

At the reception Judy found her chance. 'Excuse me..., ' she said. The woman didn't hesitate: 'We have a connection, don't we?' The best connection of all: prayer."¹

God makes the impossible possible. The only question is whether we believe and follow where God is leading with faith, hope and love.

Our scripture reading from the 14th chapter of John shows that.

It's a famous passage, where Jesus offers encouragement to the disciples during a difficult time. It's a good message for today.

¹ <https://www.guideposts.org/inspiration/angels/connected-by-an-amazing-answered-prayer>

This is another passage where it's important to know context.

Jesus is revealing some things about his identity and relationship to God.

Here's the setting. Jesus and the disciples are in the upper room. He washed their feet, they ate dinner and then Jesus shared bread and wine with them. Jesus offered grace in a rite we still perform, communion. The evening is going well.

Then Jesus tells the group one of them is about to betray him.

Judas and Jesus have some words and Judas leaves. No one understands where Judas is going. It was nighttime when he left. Everyone's upset. Peter makes a promise he can't keep. The group is unsettled. Jesus calms them.

There's a heavy shadow on the conversation, but there's hope as well. After all, there aren't any crowds, soldiers, accusers, politicians, temple priests or outsiders. It's just Jesus and his trusted friends, gathered in a small, dimly lit room after a meal on the eve of Passover.

Close your eyes if you can and imagine what's happening.

Put yourself at the table with the others as you listen to Jesus's voice. Feel the closeness of the room, the person you're sitting next to, the softness of your robe, the smell of bread and wine, and the intimacy of the dim candlelight.

Jesus makes his way around the room as he speaks. "My friends, I'm going away soon. And I have something else I need you to hear. Something you must all remember. This is the most important thing. Love one another. Love one another as I have loved you. It will be by your love that other people will know you are my disciples" (vv33-36).

This is the scene. This is what has just happened when Peter breaks in and asks Jesus where he is going, and Jesus responds with very familiar words we know because we hear them at funerals and memorial services. These are deeply personal, heartfelt, painful words.

They're words of comfort for some, yet painful to Jesus, spoken in this most intimate setting. Spoken to his friends with whom he's just shared a meal. Spoken to his followers who have traveled with him for three years, and whose feet he's just washed, one by one. Spoken on the night before his crucifixion and death. Hear the words ...

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In God’s house there are many dwelling places. 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, so that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-4).

Can you hear Jesus speaking to you in a personal way?

Jesus is making a promise to you, me and all people, everywhere for all time. Everyone is invited into God’s house, here and in heaven. Jesus has prepared a place for us and calls us to join him there. Love is universal and everyone is invited to embrace it, wholly and completely.

Even better, there’s good news: Jesus promises to return and take us with him. The work of becoming like Christ, living into the image of God isn’t our work. It’s the work Christ does for us. We’re united, of the same mind and spirit, through the grace of Christ. We don’t have to wonder how to get to heaven like Thomas. Jesus shows us the way.

There’s only one thing we have to do. Phillip gets to the heart of it. He says, “Master, show us God; then we’ll be content” (v8). Phillip wants assurance. He wants to experience God to be sure.

Jesus replies, “Believe (or trust) in me. God and I are one. Trust me and you will do great things” (vv11-14).

Our unity with Christ is the result of Jesus reaching out to touch each of us, one at a time. Jesus embraces our lives. Jesus reaches out and draws us to him. It’s Christ who makes us one. He makes us one by uniting us, first to himself, and second, to one another.

The only decision we have to make is whether we will trust him. Our part is to decide whether we will allow him to embrace us and draw us to him. That means drawing us into unity with God and the Holy Spirit, and into unity with one another. Our part is to say “yes” to Jesus’ invitation to be creatures of community rather than individuals.

But we have to say “yes.” We have to accept Jesus’ invitation. We have to allow ourselves to be embraced and allow others to be embraced alongside us.

Jesus is preparing you for what will follow. A good illustration is parents who are preparing their teenagers for life after high school. There's a lot to life. College, a job, an apartment, new relationships, learning how to use money, decision making ... and how faith is part of their life.

When Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (v6), he's telling us why we should accept his invitation. His invitation isn't exclusive. It's open to all. Our souls are well when we trust Jesus and allow him to embrace us. Others come in our life. Trusting Jesus means having faith in Jesus, believing he will do amazing things and help to do even more amazing things in our lives. That's the truth Jesus reveals. When we embrace it, we find the confidence to ask God for what we need to become more like Jesus.

This way, this life, isn't essentially about what we can do. It's about what God does for us that we can't do for ourselves. Our lives are made better. Our homes become more spiritually vibrant. Our neighborhoods and community learn to live in harmony. Healing begins to spread around the world. All it takes is a beginning.

Receive the invitation.

Can we open our hearts, our minds, and our spirit to the One who has invited us to join him? Believe in Jesus. Allow yourself to be embraced, becoming part of Christ's heart. Allow yourselves to be embraced into God's home. When you do, you'll find Jesus and many others waiting for you with open arms.

John 14:1-14 (CEB)

“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I’m going.”

Thomas asked, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us.”

Jesus replied, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don’t speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does his works. Trust me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.”

Acts 7:55-60 (CEB)

But Stephen, enabled by the Holy Spirit, stared into heaven and saw God’s majesty and Jesus standing at God’s right side. He exclaimed, “Look! I can see heaven on display and the Human One standing at God’s right side!” At this, they shrieked and covered their ears.

Together, they charged at him, threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses placed their coats in the care of a young man named Saul. As they battered him with stones, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, accept my life!” Falling to his knees, he shouted, “Lord, don’t hold this sin against them!” Then he died.