

Sunday, May 3, 2026

Sermon: "Satisfaction Guaranteed"

John 14:1-14 NRSVUE

Where we're headed in today's message: Discipleship is less about finding the right path, and more about following the right person.

"Satisfaction Guaranteed." You see it stamped on boxes, printed on receipts, and splashed across storefront windows and websites. It is the promise we crave before we buy. Today, the concept of guaranteed satisfaction has wandered far the shopping malls of America. It is a short story by Isaac Asimov, song titles across multiple genres, and a marketing pledge that often means, "Trust us - you won't be disappointed."

But today's text tells us that long before return policies and customer service lines, people were already looking for a guarantee. In the Upper Room, in the hours before the cross, Jesus' friends reached out for reassurance. Philip finally said what many of us feel but rarely say out loud: "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied" (v. 8). In other words, "Give me a money back guarantee, and I will feel better about investing in you."

Let's discuss this ache, this basic human need, this restless search for the one guarantee that truly satisfies - and then unpack Jesus' surprising answer.

John 14 unfolds in the thick of anxiety. Jesus has washed their feet; Judas has slipped out into the night; Peter has been told he will deny his Lord before dawn. It is into this churning atmosphere that Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me" (v. 1). He widens their field of vision: "In my Father's house are many dwelling places ... if I go to prepare a place for you ... I will come again" (vv. 2-3).

Even so, the questions keep rising.

Thomas speaks for the unsure: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (v. 5).

Philip speaks for the unsatisfied: "Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied" (v. 8).

The voices of Thomas and Philip still live in us. Are you a Thomas or a Philip? Which is more important to you, clarity or comfort? A map or an ego massage? Reassurance or instant gratification? We long for clarity (“show us the map”), and we long for certainty (“show us the Father”). We want a plan that guarantees outcomes. We want satisfaction that can be measured, reviewed, and - if needed - returned within 30 days.

But underneath both questions is something deeper and more honest: we want presence. We want to know we are not alone, that our lives are not random and have meaning.

Thomas asks for GPS coordinates. “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (v. 5). Rather than launch into a long, tendentious philosophical response, Jesus simply gives himself: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (v. 6). This is not a travel app; it is a relationship. Discipleship is not finding the right route but following the right Person.

Then Philip asks for the ultimate sign: “Show us the Father.” Jesus replies, “Have I been with you all this time ... and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (v. 9).

Many in Israel’s story had longed to see God. Moses begged, “Show me your glory.” The prophets spoke of visions and voices. Philip’s request is a cousin of this longing. And Jesus answers with a claim that would be scandalous if it were not true: the clearest, truest vision of the Father is found in the face, words and works of Jesus. “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (v. 11).

If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. He is stooping to wash feet, healing the broken, forgiving enemies, welcoming outsiders, telling the truth and laying down his life in love.

Take it a step further. If you want to know what Jesus looks like, find someone who professes to know him. Find someone who calls herself a Christian. Find someone who identifies as a Jesus follower. Find such a person, and you might find satisfaction.

There is a well-known sermon illustration that has been circulating for years. It’s an urban legend about the busy New York or Boston executive rushing to catch a train. He’s late for an appointment. He

gets to the track and bumps into a kid, knocking him to the ground and scattering his bag of Legos all over the platform. The hapless businessman, flustered, wavers momentarily, and then crouches beside the boy, pulls him to his feet, and helps him collect the Lincoln Logs. The boy is in awe, and asks him, "Mister, are you Jesus?"

And in that moment, this nameless CEO realizes that he is, in fact, Jesus. He acted precisely the same way as the Jesus who said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

This story probably never happened, at least not in this particular manner. But it does raise some interesting questions. Would you be mistaken for Jesus, or for someone who claims to know God, if:

- You act like an entitled customer who abuses the wait staff at a restaurant?
- You are a mean-spirited digital warrior who thinks it's okay to post vicious, non-constructive, or character-assassinating comments about a public figure, a business, or even a friend's personal decisions on social media?
- You are known as a prideful, arrogant, abusive and judgmental SOB?
- You walk past a homeless person in obvious need of assistance or interaction without rendering aid. In other words, no one would ever mistake you for a good Samaritan.

Philip wants to be shown the Father. Jesus says that if you know him, you know God. So the question is, "In what way does our life demonstrate a knowledge of Jesus?"

Our culture worships: clarity, comfort and convenience. But the discipleship counter-story is that satisfaction isn't guaranteed by policy or purchase. This is the first surprise of the passage: satisfaction is found in a Person.

Does Jesus guarantee satisfaction? Yes, but not the kind we typically seek. He doesn't promise that every question will be answered as we expect, that every road will be smooth, or that every pain will be quickly remediated. What he does guarantee in this text comes in three guarantees he offers as gifts.

1. He guarantees an eternal home. "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places ... I go and prepare a place for you" (vv. 2-3). Jesus anchors their future, not in wishful thinking, but in satisfying some of Abraham Maslow's top needs: shelter and security. Jesus says, "Don't trouble yourself: you have a home with the Father. Guaranteed! The world will still shake, but your future won't."

2. He guarantees the gift of divine presence. He doesn't hand them a doctrinal packet and disappear. He offers himself. "I am the way ... If you know me, you will know my Father also" (vv. 6-7). Even in his bodily absence, his presence remains through his Word and, as the chapter continues, by the Spirit (vv. 16-18). Satisfaction in Jesus' vocabulary is presence - God with us, here and now.

3. He guarantees the gift of participation. "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father" (v. 12). We get to take part in our own redemption. Greater works, he says. Not necessarily flashier miracles, but a greater scope and deeper reach. The risen Christ, by his Spirit, extending his mercy and truth through a global church. Jesus moves satisfaction beyond "my needs met" to "my life caught up in God's mission." The guarantee is meaning. Your life, your prayers and your deeds are taken up into what God is doing in the world.

In other words, Jesus offers us the gifts of a place, a person and a purpose - satisfaction guaranteed. Hard to be dissatisfied with that kind of offer.

So What's the Problem? The problem is that we too often want control, and unfortunately, that's not how it works. Like Thomas, we want to know the way and the destination. We want this so we can plan our own route, calculate the time required, and so on.

Lacking that, we would at least ask for a map with mile-markers.

But Jesus doesn't bite. He says, "I am the way." We want certainty. Jesus offers confidence - a much better offer because certainty is a feeling that fluctuates. Confidence is trust in someone's character. "Believe in God; believe also in me" (v. 1). Your peace rests on who God is, not how you feel at 2 a.m.

Often, we want relief and we want it now! Like most parents, God doesn't respond well to tantrums. Instead, God offers through Jesus Christ a sustained and ongoing presence. "Let not your hearts be troubled" doesn't mean "You'll never be troubled." It means trouble won't have the last word because God has your back. The promise is not that God will rubber-stamp our blueprint, but that God will act in ways that reveal a divine goodness.

So, is satisfaction guaranteed? Yes, just not in the same way the world guarantees it.

- It's not a guarantee of ease, but of presence: "I am with you."
- It's not a guarantee of control, but of communion: "The Father is in me, and I am in the Father."
- It's not a guarantee of your plan, but of his purpose: "Greater works ... that the Father may be glorified in the Son."
- It's not a guarantee of temporary thrills, but of eternal belonging: "I go to prepare a place for you."

When Philip says, "Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied," Jesus doesn't hand him a lightning bolt or a ladder to heaven. He hands him himself -a basin and towel. "Hey Philip, let's see that foot. ..." The guarantee comes in the form of counter-intuitive expectations, like the erroneous idea that in life we'll never walk through sorrow. Not true. What is true is that we'll never walk it alone. Or the false notion that now that I have a relationship with Christ, I'll have access to all the answers. Again, not true. What is true is that we'll have 24/7 access to the One who does have all the answers — although they are answers we may not like.

If you have a troubled heart, hear Jesus' first word again: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me" (v. 1). If you echo Thomas' question, "How can we know the way?" then also hear Jesus' second word: "I am the way" (v. 6). If you are with Philip when he demanded, "Show us the Father," hear Jesus' third word: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (v. 9). And if you are wondering whether your small life can make any difference, carry home his promise: "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do ... If in my name you ask me ... I will do it" (vv. 12-14).

This is Jesus' version of "Satisfaction Guaranteed": a place prepared for you, a person present for you, and a purpose worth investing your whole life to fulfill. Sounds like a heck of a deal to me. Alleluia, Amen.