

Sermon Easter 5A, May 7, 2023

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Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

John 14:1-14

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father'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. **And you know the way** to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "**Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?**" Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, 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. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

It's graduation season, and as the parent of a soon-to-be high school graduate, I sometimes feel like time is running out to impart some final words of wisdom and blessing to my beloved kid, while we're still all together under one roof.

Perhaps the challenge we all face of loving others well in times of transition—whether the transition be developmental or geographic or temporal—a graduation, or a move, a birth, marriage, or death— can give us all a tiny taste of the heartfelt urgency that pervades Today’s Gospel, which marks the beginning of Jesus’ Farewell Discourse to his disciples. The setting is the Last Supper, and it’s the last time Jesus and his disciples will all be together under one roof for a while. This is Jesus’ big chance to impart some parting words of wisdom and blessing to his dearest friends and followers before the Cross comes between them, and they are separated—for a time—by suffering and death.

*Jesus says to the loved ones he has gathered together, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe (by which Jesus actually means, Trust) Trust in God, trust also in me.... 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. And **you know the way to the place where I am going.**”*

*(Our good friend) Thomas (also known as Thomas the Doubter, or Thomas the Twin) then says to Jesus, “Lord, **we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?**” Jesus replies, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.**”*

In his Farewell Discourse, Jesus seeks to calm his devoted disciples’ anxiety about the uncertainties and challenges of the future by redirecting their focus to the present moment, their security in relationship with him, their security in relationship to God.

I don’t know about you, but my own thinking often takes a turn towards anxiety when considering the uncertainties and challenges that the future may hold. And so it seems especially relevant to my own life—and that of our church and our world— that a central motif in Jesus’s Farewell Discourse is the invitation to his followers to replace their fear with trust, to replace their concern about an uncertain and challenging future with confidence in His trustworthy Presence in *each* Present Moment, and to replace their worry about his ultimate destination—and theirs— with resolve to just keep traveling the path that’s before them.

As I was working on today’s sermon, a song came to mind. It was written by songwriter Lindsay Scott while she was riding her bike across the Midwest:

*You don't have to know the way
the way knows the way
You don't have to plan the way
Trust the way, feel your way
The way knows
The way knows
The way knows the way*

I have no idea whether the Songwriter identifies “The Way” in her song with “The Way” in John’s Gospel, but in any case, both her Song and John’s Gospel urge us in the direction of Trust:

Like the words of the Song gently and repeatedly assure those who hear it, Jesus gently but emphatically assures those who hear him:

You don’t need to see the destination. You just need to trust the journey. You don’t need to comprehend the destination. You just need to stay on the path.

You don’t need to know the destination. You just need to keep following the Way.

The Way, the path, the road, the journey, hod-OS in Greek, appears more than 100x in the NT. Some might argue that “The Way” or “The Journey” is THE central biblical image throughout the Bible. From the Journey of Abraham and Sarah towards the new land “God would show them”; to the Journey of the Israelites from slavery to freedom, through the wilderness to the Promised Land; to the journey of exile to Babylon and the eventual journey of return to Jerusalem. From the Journey of Mary & Joseph to Bethlehem; to the journey of the Holy Family to Egypt; to the journey of Jesus throughout all of Galilee and the surrounding regions and finally to Jerusalem. In every generation, the People of God are People on the Move.

Some scholars suggest that when, in John’s Gospel, Jesus says.

I am the Way, the Truth, the Life

Jesus is not saying 3 different things

Instead, Jesus is saying 1 thing in 3 ways

It is as if Jesus were to say to his beloved disciple

You are my beloved, my cherished, my dear one

Or as any one of us might say to our dearest friend, or partner, or child

You are my heart, my soul, my life

Jesus says to his followers “I am the Way, the Truth, the Life”
You will find your real Life and Truth in the Way.

From the earliest, apostolic days of the Church, followers of Christ were known as a people who “belonged to the Way”

*We read in Acts chapter 9 that Paul, prior to his conversion when he was still known as Saul, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found **any who belonged to the Way**, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

I love the idea that our most fundamental identity as baptized people is as people who **Belong to the Way**. We don't belong to an institution. We don't belong to a club. We don't belong to a team or a political party. We don't belong to an ideology. We don't belong to our ideas, or our feelings, or our thoughts, or our dogmas or doctrines or beliefs. We don't belong to our possessions, we don't belong to our accomplishments (and we don't belong to our failures, either, for that matter). And we certainly don't belong to our Fears. We belong to a person, and we belong to a path. We belong to Christ, and we belong to the Way.

This emphasis on the life of faith as a journey feels especially resonant to me after spending almost two years reading the First Nations Version of the Bible with our Thursday Bible Study. In the First Nations Version Jesus consistently refers to The Kingdom of Heaven as “Creator's Good Road”.

According to the wisdom of Jesus revealed in John's Gospel, Salvation (that is healing) and Eternal Life (that is the fullness of Life in and with God), are **relational** and **directional**. Salvation IS the Truth and the Life that unfolds continually within and among and around us all along the Way, as we strive to follow Jesus, along Creator's Good Road, in the direction of God's heart and God's hope for the world.

In other words, we might say, God's promise is more of a verb than a noun. God's call is more to a journey than a destination. God's Kingdom is more of a path than a place.

Or, in the words of **St. Catherine of Siena**: “*All the way to heaven is heaven...because Jesus is the Way*”

As we grapple with the challenges of an uncertain future—as individuals and communities, in our society, in our Church, on our Planet, we, like the first disciples, are sometimes apt to find ourselves filled with anxiety and apprehension.

Like our good friend, Thomas, we are sometimes apt to insist: ***“Lord, we do not know where you are going. (Heck—We don’t even know where WE are going!) How can we know the way?”***

*And we can count on Jesus responding time and again to our cry:
You DO know the way to the place where I am going.”
“I am the truth, the life, the Way”*

With these words of Jesus comes the deep and abiding assurance that, even when we encounter challenge, or pain, or loss, or disorientation, or uncertainty, on the Journey, we will never be lost, never abandoned, never alone, because Jesus IS the Way, at the same time Jesus is our constant companion and our ultimate destination all along the Way.

And, so we continue, together, on the Way, singing as we go:

(Song, revised)
You already know the way
The Way knows the Way
You don’t have to plan the way
Trust the way, on the way
The way knows
The way knows
The way knows the way