

“IT’S NOT ABOUT THE JOURNEY; IT’S ABOUT JESUS”

John 14:1-14

Fifth Sunday of Easter (Series A)

May 14, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Fifth Sunday of Easter comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 14, verses 1 through 14. It is on page 763 of the pew Bible.

On this night before Jesus’ crucifixion, he comforts his disciples by telling them of the journey he is about to finish.

Please stand as you are able for the gospel. From John 14, we begin reading at verse 1.

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ 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 authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

I have a little quiz for you. True or false: *Jesus came to show us how to get to heaven.* What do you think? *Jesus came to show us how to get to heaven.* True or false?

It’s false—very, very false. But it almost sounds right, doesn’t it?

Like most good true or false questions, it’s designed to sound almost right, so as to possibly trick you.

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But let’s put all the trickery aside and speak plainly. Here’s the key distinction: Jesus did not come to *show* us the way. Jesus came to *be* the way. He says, “**I AM the way, and the truth, and the life**” (14:6).

It might sound like too fine of a distinction. But it makes all the difference in the world. Or perhaps we should say, *it makes all the difference in heaven*. Jesus did not come to *show* the way to heaven. He came to *be* the way.

Thomas was looking for Jesus to show them the way. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house. Then he said, “**And you know the way to where I am going**” (14:4).

The disciples were confused by this, because they didn’t think they did know the way. They didn’t even know *where* the Father’s house is. How in the world could they know the way?

Think about this. If I ask you where Canada is, you can just point north. If you go that way (north) you’ll get there. But if I ask you where heaven is, which direction will you point? You might be tempted to point up. But what if I ask that same question in 12 hours, when the earth has done a half rotation? Or what if someone asks that same question in China—where “up” is the exact opposite direction. We don’t actually know the physical location of heaven, if it’s even in this realm. How in the world can Jesus say we know the way?

So Thomas says what all the disciples must have been thinking. “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (14:5).

But perhaps we are thinking of this in too natural of a way. When we think about how to get to heaven, we generally don’t think, *Take a left on Washington, then take the third right, climb to 20,000 feet, and you’ll see a bright cloud*. That’s usually not what we’re looking for when we ask, *How do I get to heaven?* We generally think of it in more religious terms.

And every religion in the world—including atheism, by the way—has some kind of way to reach heaven or maybe experience heaven on earth—either in some kind of mystical experience or in the establishment of a utopian society. There’s always some kind of good works or meditation or enlightenment, where if we can just find that thing—whatever it is—and do it right, then we’ll get to heaven—whatever heaven might be.

There’s an old theologian (Adolf Köberle) who said that you can classify all the other religions of the world into one of three categories: moralism, mysticism, and rationalism. We could call these the three journeys. These are the journeys man has invented to try to get to God.

The most obvious journey is moralism. This is the religion of the will. Perhaps if we just behave really, really well, God will be pleased with us and let us into heaven. Or maybe if we can just get all the people on earth to be nice, then we’ll have heaven on earth. That’s moralism, and it can take many different forms.

Then there’s mysticism. This is the religion of the heart. It’s the attempt to experience heaven through some kind of meditation or maybe a really emotional experience. Or maybe you get to heaven by cultivating a really sincere relationship with Jesus. That’s mysticism, and it can take many different forms.

And the third journey is rationalism. This is the religion of the brain. If I can just learn and master all the right doctrine, God will let me into heaven. Or from a more humanistic perspective, it might be the attempt to preserve our bodies or minds through science. Maybe we can even merge our bodies or minds with machines. Then we can have eternal life on earth.

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That idea might sound kind of far-fetched, but I’m not making it up. People are actually trying to do it. So that’s rationalism, and it can take many different forms.

Now, not all of these attempts are totally bad. Good morals are ... good. And we do have a relationship with Jesus, and this is good. And good doctrine is good. If we didn’t think so, I wouldn’t be telling you any of this, and you wouldn’t be listening. But none of these things are really the way to heaven. There is only one way to heaven. It’s not a method; it’s not a journey; it’s not an “ism;” it’s a *person*. And his name is Jesus. He says, “**I AM the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**” (14:6)

Now this sounds kind of exclusive, doesn’t it? And the worst sin you can commit in the religion of our culture is to be exclusive. *How dare you say that your way is the only right way? That’s so judgmental! That’s so exclusive!*

Jesus is, on the one hand, totally *inclusive*, and, on the other hand, completely *exclusive*. It’s kind of a paradox, but he really is both. The salvation Jesus accomplished is for every man woman and child in every place on earth and at every time in history. It is perfectly *inclusive* of all people. But at the same time, it is totally *exclusive*. That is, no one comes to the Father except through Jesus. Jesus is the way to the Father for all who believe. But all who insist on getting to the Father by their own way, whether they fall into the category of moralism, or mysticism, or rationalism—all who insist on gaining heaven by their own efforts are excluded.

Another pastor in our district taught me this illustration this week, and I think it’s a good one. It’s like a room with only one door. But for whatever reason, people don’t like this door, so they paint their own doors on the wall. And then they try to use these doors to get out. But they’re just painted; they’re not real. So they don’t actually work. And other people get deceived by these doors too, and they try to use them, but they just run into the wall. So pretty soon you have all these people with bloody noses, and they become disenfranchised with doors. Is it really so mean to say, *That door over there—the one with the name Jesus on it—that’s the real door?* No, of course not. They might not believe you. They might think you are mean and trying to deceive them with just another fake door. But it’s obviously the right thing to do. In fact, it would be kind of sadistic to just watch these people continue to walk into the wall when you know where the door is.

But someone might ask, *How do you know your door is really the right one? I mean, everyone seems to think their door is right. What makes you so sure you’re right and they’re all wrong?*

That’s a good question. And if we are going to make such an exclusive claim, it’s worth considering the merits of it. How do we know Jesus is really the way, and the *only* way?

It’s really quite simple. It is because Jesus said he would rise from the dead on the third day, and then he did. It’s really that simple.

Now, this means it is important for Christians to know how to defend this truth claim. It is important for us to know the evidence for it. We call this “apologetics”—*the defense of the faith*. Sometimes we try to make it as simple as possible, and sometimes we really dive deep into some of the minute details. But all of it boils down to one simple historical fact—that Jesus said he would rise from the dead, and then he did. If Jesus can predict his own crucifixion and resurrection, and then make it happen, then it might be worth listening to him.

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His resurrection from the dead is the proof that he really is the Son of God, and he really does know what he’s talking about when he calls himself “**the way, and the truth, and the life.**” When we get right up close to examine it, we can see that this is a real door, and not just a painting.

Jesus really is “**the way, and the truth, and the life.**”

And this makes Jesus different from every other religion in the world. Because it’s not about us. Christianity is not moralism. It’s not about completing the journey of good works. And Christianity is not mysticism. It’s not about the journey of our feelings. And Christianity is not rationalism. It’s not about the journey of our own intellect. Christianity is about one thing, and one thing only—Jesus Christ, who has done everything for us.

If Christianity is one of these “journey” religions, then Jesus isn’t a Savior, but merely a teacher who shows us how to be saved. But Jesus did not come to show us how to be saved. He came to actually save us. And he did.

When Jesus says, “**You know the way to where I am going,**” it kind of sounds like he’s talking about a journey—a path we follow to get to heaven. But if Jesus has come to show us how to follow in his footsteps, then we’re doomed, because the first step on the “Jesus road” is to be born of a virgin. That’s going to be a problem for ... well ... all of us. We’ve lost the path from the very start. Then the steps that follow involve living a sinless life, performing miracles, teaching the Word of God with perfect insight, suffering an innocent death, and rising from the dead. This is a journey that Jesus—and only Jesus—is capable of walking. He walks this path—he completes the journey—not to *show* us the way, but to *be* the way.

So when he says, “**You know the way,**” he simply means, *You know me, and I am everything.*

Christianity is not about following the “Jesus road.” It’s not a journey we can make. So it’s not about the journey; it’s about Jesus. He has walked the path. He has completed the journey for us. So he does not *show* us the way. He *is* the way.

So on this night before his crucifixion, Jesus says to his disciples, “**Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. 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, that where I am you may be also.**” (14:1-3)

So what does Jesus mean when he says, “**I go to prepare a place for you**”? Is he just going to float up to heaven and put his carpentry skills to work? Is that what Jesus does to prepare a place for you? No; not at all. Jesus spoke these words on the night before his crucifixion. He goes to the cross. There he suffers and dies for the sin of the world so that he might reconcile us to his Father in heaven. Jesus goes to the Father by way of his death and resurrection. And thus he prepares a place for us, so that when he returns he can take us with him to our eternal home in heaven. Jesus has done this for you. So do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe in his Son Jesus. Jesus completed his journey. He went to the cross for you. He rose again from the dead. He has ascended to our Father in heaven.

There is a journey. But it’s not for you. It is Jesus’ journey. He has accomplished it, and so he is our way to the Father. Jesus is coming again. He will take us to the place he has prepared. Jesus is “**the way, and the truth, and the life.**” Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.