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John 14:1-14

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THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

Earlier this summer, my wife and I went on vacation in Florida. We arrived in Ft. Lauderdale around midnight and rented a car. She had made our hotel reservations, so as we reached the freeway I asked her how to get to the hotel. She said she didn't know. We knew which direction to go, but we didn't have a map or a printout of directions. It was one o'clock in the morning and we didn't know the way. We knew the destination, we just didn't know the way to go.

This describes the way many of us live our lives. We travel through life at breakneck speed, feverishly trying to obtain and accomplish, but we don't stop to think about where we are headed or how to get there. What is our destination? How do we get there? When Jesus told the disciples that he was leaving them and they couldn't go with him, they become fearful and confused. They wanted to follow him, but they didn't know the way. Jesus told them that he is the "way."

Jesus and his men are in the upper room, the place where he delivered two farewell discourses. Such discourses or testaments of famous men from the ancient world were a known genre of literature in the Hellenistic world, but they were even more common in Jewish literature. Think of Jacob's last words to his sons (Gen 49), Joshua's final remarks to his people (Joshua 22-24), and David's address to Solomon and to the nation (1 Chron 28-29). Jesus' last words remind us of these addresses. But perhaps they are more closely connected to Moses' address, recorded in Deuteronomy, as the people were about to enter the new land. In the upper room, Jesus, the greater Moses, addresses his disciples as they are about to enter the age of the Spirit.

This section of John has two parallel discourses of Jesus – 13:31-14:31 and 15:1-16:33, followed by a prayer, in chapter 17. The first discourse begins when Judas departs, although some feel that it doesn't really begin until 14:1. These two discourses are separated by a confusing verse at the end of chapter 14: "Get up, let us go from here." But we must remember that John is not worried about chronology.

The two discourses contain several repeated themes:

- Loving one another – 13:34, 15:12, 15:17
- The departure of Jesus to the Father and his coming again – 14:2-3, 18-20, 22-23, 28; 16:5-7
- The revelation of the Father – 14:9; 17:6, 26
- Praying in Jesus' name – 14:13-15, 16:23-24, 26
- Jesus' relationship to the Father – 14:6-7, 9-11, 28; 15:10, 23-24; 16:15; 17:1-2, 4-5, 8, 10, 21-26
- Keeping Jesus' commands – 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10, 12-14, 17
- The Holy Spirit – 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15
- The judgment of the prince of the world – 14:30, 16:11

We begin with verse 1 of chapter 14:

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were

not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." (John 14:1-4 NASB)

Hearing Jesus tell the disciples that he was leaving and they couldn't come with him, Peter, in a volcanic display of emotion, offered to lay down his life for him. But Jesus told him that he was going to crash and burn. At this point the disciples were confused and fearful. They had set their hopes Jesus. What would happen if he left? What about the kingdom that he had promised?

Jesus gives them an encouragement, an exhortation, and a promise. The encouragement is, "Do not let your heart be troubled." We have seen this word "troubled" three times already. Jesus was troubled when Lazarus died (11:33), when his hour had arrived (12:27), and when he announced his betrayal (13:21). Now Jesus encourages the "troubled" disciples to be calm. Settle down, he is saying. Don't let your fear paralyze you. Everything will be fine. These are like the words of Joshua to the nation as they prepared to enter the land: "be strong and courageous."

The encouragement is followed by an exhortation to "believe." The object of faith is both God and Jesus, a very important theme in John. Linking the name of Jesus with the name of God is what drove the religious experts crazy.

Believing is central to calming a troubled or anxious heart. Believing that God will be with you and will work all things for good. Believing without seeing. One can imagine that this is what Jesus had to do when he was faced with the same emotion. He had to trust his Father in the death of a friend, in betrayal by a friend, and in leaving his friends for the cross. Now he tells the disciples to do the same thing. This is consistent with what James says: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind" (Jas 1:5-6).

The exhortation is followed by a promise which becomes the specific truth that the disciples are to believe as Jesus departs. He tells them that his Father has a big house with many "dwelling places." He is going ahead of them to make preparations for their coming to stay with him and his Father. The preparation is the going itself, i.e., the cross and the resurrection. Jesus says he will come back and receive them. He doesn't go and wait at the end; he comes for his bride.

The timing of Jesus' return refers to several things in this gospel: his return following the resurrection, his coming back by the Spirit, and his coming back at the end of the age. The second coming is probably in view here. When the disciples arrive at the Father's house, there will be a hot meal waiting, the bed will be turned down and there will be a piece of chocolate on the pillow.

The disciples would have associated the Father's house with the temple, the place where God dwells. The reference here is to heaven, a final resting place, a permanent home, where God resides forever. The truth is that without Jesus present there will be another exodus, a way to get back to the presence of God. It is to the disciples' advantage that Jesus goes so that he can prepare a place. This truth is designed to comfort them and help them persevere. This text is often read at funerals and memorials to comfort the grieving.

We have all encountered times when life changes suddenly and we are uncertain of the future. We have experienced the emotions that uncertainty brings – anxiety, doubt, fear and confusion. We want to believe that things will be all right and that God will take care of us. We are encouraged when a trustworthy person comforts us with reassuring words.

But painful loss and fearful uncertainty cause deep yearnings and longings to surface. The longing is for home – a permanent place of rest and security, a place without fear, a place where we belong. When my children were not feeling well, their first words were, "Where's mom?" The thought of mom holding them was magical. The comfort and safety of home is healing and soothing. Many times throughout my life when the journey has gotten particularly difficult I find myself whispering without even thinking, "I want to go home." A troubled heart always wants home.

This life will never be the permanent answer to these longings, no matter how good it gets or how secure and safe the dwelling. This is hard for us to accept. Jesus promises us something better than this world – a permanent home. He went to the Father to prepare a wonderful place, a permanent dwelling, a home not made with hands, where we are ushered into the presence of God to live free from worry and fear. Imagining this home comforts our troubled hearts and fills us with hope.

When I long for this permanent home, I often think of the song that Maria sings to Tony in *West Side Story*:¹

There's a place for us,
Somewhere a place for us.
Peace and quiet and open air
Wait for us
Somewhere.

There's a place for us,
A time and place for us.
Hold my hand and we're halfway there.
Hold my hand and I'll take you there
Somehow,
Some day,
Somewhere!

Jesus wants to flush out the disciples, so he provokes them in verse 4:

"And you know the way where I am going." (14:4)

Thomas, the loyal but doubting disciple, responds to this word with a question:

Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" (14:5)

The word "going" connects to the last section, when Jesus said, "Where I am going you cannot come," and Peter asked, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus responds by telling his disciples that he is going to his Father's house, the true temple, the place where the

Father dwells in glory. Thomas reveals that he and the disciples have not really come to grips with what Jesus said about the destination. Thomas wants all the ambiguity removed. In effect, he is asking, "If we do not know the destination, how can we know the route?"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (14:6)

Here is the sixth of seven "I am" statements in this gospel. Jesus answers Thomas's question thus: "The Father is where I am going, and I am how you will get there." This is the heart of the matter. We do not know the location of the Father's house. But we know the way. And that is why Jesus says "Believe in God, believe also in Me." Believe in Jesus as the way and the truth and the life.

The idea that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life is so significant we could ponder its meaning for hours. All three words appear with regularity in the OT. Jesus is the way because he is the way to God. Jesus is the truth because he is the true light that enlightens every man, the supreme revelation of God. Jesus is the life because he has life in himself. He is the resurrection and life, and he offers that life to anyone who believes. "The Jesus way wedded to the Jesus truth brings about the Jesus life."² Jesus does not teach the way, he does not guide us to the way, he himself is the way. This gives new meaning to familiar verses like we find in Psalm 37, "Commit your way to the Lord," or Psalm 143, "Teach me the way in which I should walk." Jesus is that way.

Thomas a Kempis once said: "Follow thou me. I am the way and the truth and the life. Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the truth which thou must believe; the life for which thou must hope. I am the inviolable way; the infallible truth, the never-ending life. I am the straightest way; the sovereign truth; life true, life blessed, life uncreated."³

Not only is Jesus the way, he is the exclusive way to the Father. So much for thinking that there are many ways or paths to God. Christianity is not merely one more religion among many. We cannot come to the true knowledge of God by growing in human experience, developing our potential or finding the road that suits us. The claim that Jesus is the exclusive way to God is difficult for us to grasp. It isn't politically correct. It seems narrow-minded and judgmental. The world wants an equal opportunity God. Therefore we must be able to answer the question of why: Why is Jesus the only way? Jesus goes on to provide the crucial answer.

"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." (14:7)

Jesus tells the disciples that knowing him is knowing the Father and seeing him is seeing the Father. This prompts a question from Philip:

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." (14:8)

The disciples still do not recognize the Father in Jesus. They know Jesus, but they do not yet fully know him. Jesus explains further:

Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who 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 initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am

in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. (14:9-11)

For once it isn't Peter but Philip who is asking the question. Earlier Jesus had tested Philip when he fed the multitude, and here he tests him again. Philip did not understand how Jesus was going to feed the five thousand. And he did not understand how he could see the Father in Jesus. He is spiritually blind even after three years with Jesus. So Jesus rebukes him because he and the other disciples should have known the truth.

And here is the truth: God and Jesus are one. Jesus says and does what the Father says and does. Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus. There is complete unity between the Father and the Son (10:30). The reason that Jesus is the exclusive way to the Father is because he is God.

This distinguishes Jesus from any other prophet or messenger or system of belief. The way to God has to be God himself. In order to maintain the holiness of God there can be no filthiness, no hint of the depravity of man soiling, contaminating and tainting the path that leads to God. God is holy and the way must be holy. Only God can take you to God. There is one Father, one way to the Father, one family born of the Father.

Men and women throughout the ages have longed to know God. Mankind has sought this as the highest experience – to see God in his splendor and majesty and glory. We yearn for the *visio Dei*, the vision of God. Moses had asked for this (Ex 33:18), but was only allowed to glimpse the trailing edge of the back of God's glory. Whenever and wherever there is a hint or chance of seeing the glory of God, people will travel around the world for merely a glimpse. Our yearning for home is the yearning for the glory of God. The psalmist expresses it this way:

**One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD
And to meditate in His temple. (Psa 27:4)**

We don't long just for a home, we long for a home with the Father. The only way we can be invited into the presence of the Father is by God himself. This is why Jesus is the only way. So once again Jesus says, "Believe." "Believe in God, believe also in Me." And if you need help, then think about the works that Jesus did.

However, not only is Jesus the way to the Father, he is the way to live and experience life right now in the present.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." (14:12-14)

Jesus promises the disciples that they will do the same works that he has been doing. This began to happen shortly after the resurrection. Jesus also says that the disciples will do even greater works. This doesn't mean more spectacular works, such as the raising of Lazarus. The clue is in 5:20, which uses the same phrase, "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel."

The works become greater because of the new order of the Spirit age that will begin when Jesus goes to the Father. Prior to the cross,

the works were veiled. After the resurrection, the disciples will begin to have a greater result spiritually in people's lives than Jesus did. Many more people will come to believe in Jesus after he has gone.

The way these greater works will happen is by prayer, by asking in the name of Jesus. This doesn't mean that you can get anything you want. It means praying in thorough accord with all that Jesus' name stands for. And all of this is possible because Jesus goes to the Father and the new age will dawn with the coming of the Spirit. The ones who get in on this will be the ones who believe.

Jesus is saying to us: Do not be troubled. I know it will be hard, but I want you to carry on after I have gone. Because you know me, you know the Father. You have seen what I have done, but you will do even more than me. You may not exactly know where you are going, but believe and trust that I am the way to a glorious place. I will not leave you alone. I will come and get you and take you there. You will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

As I reflect on this passage, I realize that Jesus is more than the way to get to the destination that my heart longs for. He is more than the train conductor to the Father's house. The way we are going is just as important as where we are going. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. But "way" gets the most weight.

"Way" means road or path, and thus denotes a journey. In the history of religion, "way" is connected to the idea of the ascent of the soul to the heavenly world. In the OT, God led his people on the way out of Egypt, on the way through the wilderness, and on the way into the Promised Land. Now Jesus takes us on a journey and teaches us the Jesus way. Actually, "The Way" was the name given to the community of early believers in the book of Acts.

The "way" gets us

... involved in the action of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 'Way' has a literal denotation of road, path, highway, street, and so on. But it simultaneously expands with connotations ranging broadly and comprehensively into the way we talk (boldly or hesitantly, kindly or sarcastically, lovingly or angrily, smoothly or roughly, reverently or blasphemously), the way we walk (leisurely or hastily, confidently or confusedly, strongly or weakly), the way we appear (groomed or slovenly), the way we behave (uprightly or criminally, straightforwardly or deviously, openly or slyly, generously or stingily, courteously or rudely).⁴

Peterson is being very candid when he writes: "The North American church at present is conspicuous for replacing the Jesus way with the American way."⁵

To live in the Jesus way does not mean pursuing a comfortable life. It doesn't mean to enter into an ascetic isolation from community. It doesn't mean protecting yourself from an evil world by a set of rules or political maneuvering. It doesn't mean a great show of enthusiasm, although it somehow fills our heart with joy. The way of Jesus means loving like Jesus, serving like Jesus, speaking like Jesus, praying like Jesus, living and dying like Jesus. The way of Jesus means that we become less and he becomes more. The way of Jesus means being present to the relationships right before us – our mechanic, our store clerk, our waitress. It means being present to God's invasion into the ordinariness of life. The way of Jesus means seeing the work of the Holy Spirit while it is happening, not a year later.

Way means more than a way to get to the top of the mountain. It is a way of being present to everything on the way up. "Robert Pirsig wrote: 'To live only for some future goals is shallow. It's the sides of

the mountain which sustain life, not the top. Here's where things grow. But of course, without the top you can't have the sides. It's the top that defines the sides."⁶ It is where we are headed that defines the way we live.

Last week, Marni Cook shared some reflections about our trip to the Yucatan. When you are in the middle of nowhere, you are stripped of everything that can distract and occupy. There is no television to watch while you are lying in your hammock at night. You can't talk to your hammock mates because you are wearing earplugs to keep out the noise of the dogs and the roosters. You are confronted with how you are living, how you are loving, how you are praying. During our week in the Yucatan I happened to be reading the book *The Jesus Way*, by Eugene Peterson. All week I was asking myself: Is my way the Jesus way?

I ask you to think about that too. Is the Jesus way the way you are going? This isn't easy work. There are no rules or methods. It may look different in one person than another. It is more about what is going on inside than the activities we are signing up for. But no one is going to give you a grade or look at your scorecard. I urge you to spend time with the Lord in solitude, reflecting on the Jesus way, asking him how he wants you to live the Jesus way right now, and praying his way in his name into your life.

The promise is that if we live the Jesus way, by the Spirit as a worshipping community, then we will see greater works than Jesus did. People will see Jesus and they will believe that he is the way to the Father. We will see the love of the Father transforming hearts, and the Spirit of God bringing wholeness to broken lives. Do not be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in the Jesus way.

St. Catherine wrote: "All the way to heaven is heaven, because He had said, 'I am the way.'"⁷

¹ Music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. © 1956, 1957 Amberson Holdings LLC and Stephen Sondheim. Copyright renewed. Leonard Bernstein Music Publishing Company LLC, Publisher.

² Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2007), 4.

³ Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 56.

⁴ Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, 26-27.

⁵ Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, 5.

⁶ Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, 41.

⁷ Peterson, *The Jesus Way*, 41.

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