

5.7.2023 Easter 5

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

“Look to him”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

What has been the chart and compass in your life? What is the way by which you have navigated challenge and change and the joys and sorrows of life? We often use the phrase that someone is “finding their way” in the world, meaning perhaps they have found their profession, their passion, their reason for living. My question this morning is a bit deeper – what is the chart and compass that is guiding you in finding your way in the world?

Jesus’ words, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life,*” are the very core of the Christian message. In this brief sentence, Jesus is telling us everything we need to know about him as the chart and compass of finding our way in this world. He is the way that leads to the Father. His shared humanity with us shows us what our humanity is truly capable of. In him is life, and his life is the light of the world. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

It is no mistake that early Christians called their religion, the Way – “the Way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25). They referred to themselves as “the Way” because Christianity is not simply a philosophy, theology or creed, but a living relationship with the way, Jesus Christ. Thomas and Philip needed to learn, as do we, to journey on the way of Jesus. The way is a living relationship with Jesus, who is truth and life for us.

Thomas’s question is humanity’s question: “*Lord, how can we know the way?*” As human beings, we continue to look everywhere for God – often in the face of tragedy we do not see that Christ suffers with us, journeys with us, and helps us as we suffer with others. We must stay close to him; he is the chart and the compass. The one who says, “*I am the way*” is also the one who says, “*Follow me.*” The way of Jesus is not an esoteric spiritual leaving or renunciation of this world; to follow him means living unreservedly in this world, serving and helping others.

The image that Jesus uses as the goal and destination of the way is “*my Father’s house.*” Jesus is leading us to the house of many rooms. It is a house with room in abundance; there is room for everyone. It is the Father’s house; and therefore, it is different than every other house in this world. In this world, human beings are masters at limiting who has access to certain houses, certain communities, and certain groups. We try to limit those who are in and those who are out. Jesus tells all people that the way to the Father is open to all who believe, and that his house has

room in abundance for everyone.

Jesus is describing a new community in him in which all are welcome. This means he is the way for all people in this world; we must stay close to him, serving, loving, welcoming, healing and suffering with him for others. Jesus' words invite us into spiritual engagement in this world. Believe in him, he is the way, the truth and the life. He is the chart and compass.

Philip's request is a request for a short-cut on the way: "*Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.*" It is as if, once seeing the Father, we won't need to journey on the way. We can just sit back and glory in God's radiance while the world and our neighbor suffer. Jesus' disappointment is clear in his response to Philip: "*Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*" Jesus is the door, the gate, through which we must pass to see the Father. In looking to Jesus, we see God the Father, and we know the way to unity and acceptance of all humanity in the Father's love for this world.

What is at stake here is that we cannot see God's glory or know anything about God unless we look to Jesus. Martin Luther famously argued that the only place we can clearly see Jesus, his way, truth and life is in his cross, hidden in suffering love for all humanity. Look to him, he is the way, the way of the cross, the way of steadfast love for all the world. Look to him.

Yet the world continues to reject him. Peter writes of this: "*The stone which the builders rejected has become the very cornerstone.*" Peter says, "*Come to him, a living stone – like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.*" Though John's gospel is often read at funerals, the way to the Father's house is not simply an end of life event, only a distant future reality for the living. This spiritual house is a present reality – a community that Christ, the living stone, is building. He is fashioning you over your lifetime into a living stone, hewn, polished and set into the spiritual house of God. Every time we gather in this place we are being built into a spiritual house – the Father's house visible in this world. The Father's house has abundant room for all people – for this world God so loves! Come to him, the living stone who will make you into a royal priesthood serving all people. Come to Him.

Early Christians like Thomas, Philip and Peter had to learn to walk in the Way – to believe in him, look to him, and come to him – "*a living stone.*" We are no different from them. We are also being built into God's spiritual house. This is how our spiritual house, St. Mark's, has found its way in this world. Churches do not exist simply as dead stone, bricks and mortar; churches exist as spiritual houses built of living stones. You are each being fashioned by God into living spiritual

stones. Each of you are needed and important in the building of the Father's house in this world. Together, we are the living and breathing body of Christ. The church is the new community that Christ is building in this world. It is a place where all humanity is accepted and reconciled to God and to one another. In the Father's house there is room in abundance for all.

Jesus invites us over and over into the way of God's new human community in this world. It is a community welcoming all people – all ethnicities, genders, and identities – all the world that God so loves. The spiritual house that Christ is building is a sign in the midst of the world that true human community is possible. Look to him. When we are with Jesus, we know the way to the Father, a place of abundant room for all. When we are with Jesus, we know the truth about God and ourselves, and in him we have life to share with our neighbor.

Believe in him, he is the way, the truth and the life.

Look to him, and you will see the love of the Father.

Come to him, the living stone; let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.

What is the chart and compass of your life? How will you make you way in this world?

*Believe in him. Look to him. Come to him.*

He is the way, the truth and the life. Amen.