

We are all, *all* of us, travelers on a spiritual journey—a journey of faith that leads us home to Jesus Christ. And the nice thing about this journey is that we’re guaranteed to get there, because this is Jesus’ promise to us as the resurrected Christ—that Jesus will meet us, *all* of us, where we are, as we are, and take us safely home. All we have to do is ask.

Please pray with me:

God of a thousand journeys, we come to you this morning asking for your help in taking us home—home to your Son, Jesus, the resurrected Christ to whom all spiritual journeys point, by whom all spiritual journeys are planned, and through whom all spiritual journeys are completed.

We ask for your help in confidence, knowing that we will get it, because just as Jesus met the disciples where *they* were and helped *them*, so, too, do we know that Jesus will meet us where *we* are and give *us* the help we need, as well. Just like the disciples in this passage from John, we know that all we need to do is ask.

And so we ask for your help, we ask for your blessing, we ask for Christ to bring us safely home—knowing that even as we ask, our prayers are already answered.

Amen.

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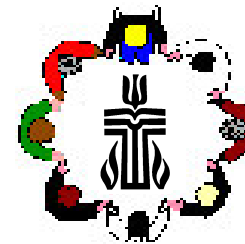
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“Coming Home to Jesus”

Sermon by
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Second Sunday of Easter
March 30, 2008



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John 20:19-31

“Reaching Up to God ...
Reaching Out to Others.”

John 20:19-31

I don't know if you've seen the movie, "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles," that old Steve Martin and John Candy movie made back in the 80s, but there's this scene in the movie that makes me laugh every time I see it. It's this scene where John Candy is driving this rental car that previously caught on fire, and basically it's just this shell of a car—I don't think there's upholstery on the seats or anything, and the outside of the car is all charred and black because of the car having caught on fire—it's the kind of car that makes people stare and wonder not only *how* the car is even drivable, but *why* anyone would *want* to drive such a vehicle.

Anyway, John Candy and Steve Martin get pulled over by a state highway patrolman for speeding in this burned-up car. So the scene starts out with John Candy cheerfully greeting the patrolman:

"Top of the morning, officer! Is there something I can help you with?"

The officer just looks at him and says, "What the heck are you driving?!"

So John Candy explains that they had a small fire the night before, which is why the car looks the way it does.

The officer thinks about that for a moment, and then asks them if they have any idea how fast they were going.

So John Candy tells him that it would actually be very difficult to say, with any degree of accuracy, just how fast they were going, because as it happens their speedometer was melted.

So the officer asks him: "Do you feel this vehicle is safe for highway travel?"

And John Candy reassures him that yes ... yes, he does; he realizes the car's not pretty to look at, but it gets you where you want to go just the same.

The officer notes there's no outside mirror. John Candy admits that it's lost.

The officer points out that the car has no functioning gauges, which of course John Candy is forced to acknowledge because this is in fact, is true—the car *doesn't* have any functioning gauges, but in an effort to try and save the day he helpfully points out to the officer that despite all of these things that are wrong with the car, the radio still works great. Funny as it seems, he says, the radio's really working great.

All to no avail. The officer ends up impounding the burned-up car until such time as it can be made for highway travel. John Candy and Steve Martin are then forced to find another way home.

Which *is*, of course, what the movie's about to begin with—going home. Steve Martin is a businessman who's desperately trying to return home to Chicago from a business trip in New York, but a whole series of unfortunate events cause his plane to be rerouted to Wichita, which then leads to a train that breaks down in the middle of nowhere, which then leads to him renting that car that eventually catches on fire. Along the way he befriends John Candy, who sort of sticks to him like a bad penny, so the movie chronicles their misadventures together in trying to get home.

"Funnily enough," as John Candy might say, I was reminded of this movie when I read today's passage from the Gospel of John, that famous passage about "doubting Thomas." And the reason I was reminded of this movie about going home is because it seems to me that the essence of this passage is all about just that—getting home. Or, maybe, "coming home" would be a better way to put it. Because this passage is all about coming "home" to Jesus.

Understanding that Jesus is who he said he is—the resurrected Christ—is the clearly the focus of this passage. So, in a sense, Jesus is "home," and the disciples need to get there—they need to understand that he's the Messiah. There are different ways of arriving at this understanding, though—there are different ways of getting "home." Just as we use different modes of transportation like planes, trains, and automobiles to take us home here on earth, there are different modes of spiritual transportation that take us home to Jesus, as well.

In fact, if we take a closer look at this text, we can see that three of them are described in this passage, three different modes of spiritual transportation, the first of which is this: the Holy Spirit.

Verse 22 tells us that *Jesus breathed on them*—Jesus breathed on the disciples. And, in so doing, Jesus gave them new life through the Holy Spirit. Just as God breathed new life into Adam in the book of Genesis, so, too, does Jesus breathe new life into the disciples gathered together that day.

And suddenly, the disciples are home. They can see, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus is the Messiah. They can see that he is Lord (v. 25). In other words, they've come home—they've come home to Jesus.

So that's the first way to come home to Jesus—*by receiving the Holy Spirit*.

The second mode of spiritual transportation described in this passage is found in that scene between Jesus and Thomas. It turns out that for whatever reason, Thomas wasn't there with the rest of the disciples when Jesus breathed on them, so Thomas didn't have the Holy Spirit like the other disciples did. So maybe it's not so surprising that Thomas demanded proof that Jesus was the resurrected Christ—because Thomas didn't have the power of the Holy Spirit to help him understand.

So Jesus wasn't offended at all when Thomas asked him for proof. Jesus just gave it to him—he showed Thomas his wounds. In fact, not only did Jesus *show* Thomas the scars of his crucifixion, he invited Thomas to *touch* them—he invited Thomas to actually poke his fingers into his flesh so that Thomas could not only *see*, but also *feel*, that Jesus is the resurrected Christ.

So Thomas looks at Jesus' scars, and he did in fact poke his fingers in them—and immediately Thomas comes home to Jesus. "My Lord and my God!" he cried. And with this confession of faith Thomas affirms that he *gets* it—he understands he's home. Because Thomas now understands what Jesus has been telling him all along—that Jesus is not just the *Son* of God—Jesus actually *is* God.

So that's the second mode of spiritual transportation—*proof*.

Which brings us to the third mode of spiritual transportation, which Jesus tells us right there in verse 29—*faith*. "Blessed are those who have *not* seen, and yet have come to believe." In other words, Jesus says, blessed are those who believe *without* any proof—those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, *on faith*, just because Jesus *says* to believe.

So that's the third mode of spiritual transportation—*faith*.

There are planes, trains, and automobiles here in our physical world—and there's the Holy Spirit, proof, and faith in our spiritual world, that world that lies *beyond* our physical world. One way gets us home here on earth; the other way gets us home to Jesus.

How is Jesus calling *you* home? Is the *Spirit* convicting your heart? Have you seen *proof* of Jesus' power or presence? Or do you simply accept, on *faith*, that Jesus is who he says he is?