

Because what we *do* understand, what we *do* hear, is this: That *Jesus is there for us*. Jesus is *here* for us. Somehow, some way, *Jesus is here*.

And, just like the disciples, we know this because Jesus said so. We know this because we trust Jesus. We know this because we *believe*.

I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

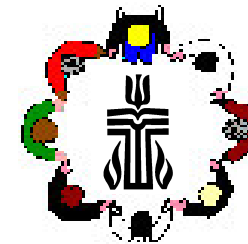
Amen.

References

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"The Way, the Truth, and the Life"
Sermon by
Rev. Nancy Lynch

Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 20, 2008



Trinity Presbyterian Church
Reverend Nancy Lynch, Pastor
6081 Ross Road
Fairfield, Ohio 45014

513-860-4114
www.trinitypcfairfield.org
office@trinitypcfairfield.org

John 14:1-14

"Reaching Up to God ...
Reaching Out to Others."

John 14:1-14

Today's reading in the Gospel of John takes us back in time, back to the night of the Last Supper, back *before* Jesus was crucified and resurrected.

And the reason the lectionary has done this is simple—because this particular reading isn't so much about Jesus and the upcoming Easter—it's about the disciples *after* Easter. More specifically, what Jesus is doing here is reassuring the disciples that even though Good Friday is imminent, they'll be fine. Remember ... what Jesus has just done is tell the disciples he's about to be betrayed, and he's about to die, and he's about to leave them. So the disciples are, understandably, a little upset.

So Jesus tells them: There's no reason for their hearts to be troubled. There's no reason for them to be afraid. Because just as Jesus was there for them *before* Good Friday, so, too, would Jesus be there for them *after* Good Friday.

And the reason he'll be there is simple—because, he says, he is the way, and the truth, and the life.

This all makes perfect sense to us now—now that we've had 2000 or so years to think about Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, now that we've had some time to process and understand what it all means. So it's hard for us to appreciate today just how difficult it must have been for the disciples to have heard those words back then.

Think about it. There you are, having dinner with your good friend Jesus, who's just washed your feet, which is, admittedly, a very strange thing for him to do. Jesus has just identified Judas as a betrayer and kicked him

out of the house so Judas can go ahead and just get his betraying over with already. He's just told Peter, one of his top three disciples, that Peter would deny knowing him not once, not twice, but *three* times before the rooster crowed the next morning. He's just told *all* of them that he's only going to be with them a little while longer, and that where he's going they can't go—so they will, in essence, be on their own.

But they don't have to worry about *any* of that, Jesus says—because he is the way, and the truth, and the life.

I don't know about you, but I'm pretty sure I know what *my* reaction would have been to that news. *My* reaction would have been—*What?!* What do you *mean*, you're the “way”? How is it that you're the “truth”? How can you be the “life” when you say you're about to die? What does that all *mean*? What are you talking about?

And, in fact, that's *exactly* the reaction Jesus gets from the disciples. Thomas is the first to question Jesus about all of this when he says, “Lord, if we don't know where you're going, how can we know the way?”

So Jesus explains what he means here, what he means when he says he's the way, and the truth, and the life. He explains that he's not talking here about a literal, *geographic* way, like a road to a particular place—what he's talking about, instead, is a “way” that reveals a new understanding, a “way” that's a new way of thinking about God. Because the “way” that Jesus is talking about is the “way” to God—a *new* way, which Jesus says is through *him*.

So Jesus explains to them: If you know me, he says—which you do—if you know me, then you know God. Because I am the way to God. I am the way to the Father.

But the disciples, it seems, are skeptical, so much so that Philip presses Jesus on this. He challenges Jesus to show them the Father. He asks Jesus, in other words, to *prove it*. Back it up, Philip says. If you're *really* the way to the Father, then just show us the Father. Then, and *only* then, will we believe you.

So Jesus just looks at him. *Don't you get it?* Jesus asks Philip. *Do you still not understand who I am?* Do you still not see that I am the way to God, because I *am* God?

Philip *doesn't* see, of course. He doesn't understand. Neither does Thomas. Neither does Peter. Neither do *any* of the disciples, for that matter ... which, of course, is why Jesus is having this conversation with them to begin with. Because Jesus *knows* they don't understand it. He *knows* they don't get it.

And *because* they don't understand, *because* they don't get it, they're scared. They're scared about what will happen to Jesus; they're scared about what will happen to *them* as a result; they're scared about where they'll be and what they'll be doing; they're scared about making it on their own. They're just scared, *period*.

Sort of like the way *we* get scared when *we're* faced with situations that blindsides *us* the way the disciples no doubt felt blindsided—situations for which we're not prepared, situations where the outcome's uncertain, situations where we don't know what will happen to *us* as a result, where we're not sure where *we'll* be or what *we'll* be doing, where we're not sure we can make it on our own. Situations where *we're* just scared, *period*.

So Jesus steps away for a moment ... he steps away from his own grief at his impending death, he wrenches himself out of his own self-reflection, he puts himself in the place of the disciples gathered around him ... and he tries to explain this to them one last time, he

tries to reassure them on this, the last night he'll spend with them, by telling them what they need to hear:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

I am the way, Jesus says, because I *am* the truth. I am the way, he says, because I *am* the life.

I am the way, he says ... because I *am* God.

And so, Jesus says, there's no reason at all for you to be troubled, even when all the things I say will happen, happen. There's *nothing* for you to be scared of—there's *nothing* for you to fear. Because I am the way *out* of your fear. I am the way *into* your hope. I am the way *to* your God ... because I *am* your God.

And *because* I'm your God, Jesus says, I will help you. Whatever you need ... whatever you ask. Just call on me, and I will be there for you.

Because I am the way, and the truth, and the life. Because I am your God.

And the disciples *were* reassured, even though I have to believe they *still* didn't understand all that Jesus was telling him; even though they still didn't quite understand this whole “way, and the truth, and the life” thing that Jesus was talking about.

Because what they *did* understand, what they *did* hear, was this: That *Jesus would still be there for them*. Somehow, some way, Jesus would be there. They knew this because Jesus said so. They knew this because they trusted Jesus. They knew this because they *believed*.

And, just as the disciples were reassured by Jesus' words, so, too, may *we* be reassured. Even if we don't quite understand all that Jesus has told us; even if we don't quite understand this whole, “way, and the truth, and the life” thing that Jesus talked about.