

April 24, 2005
5th Sunday of Easter
John 14:1-12
Pastor Ott

You Know the Way

Did you ever ask the way to get to some place and you got a set of directions that didn't do you much good? When I first was assigned to be Pastor in Minnesota, I was going to go visit someone, and I asked how to get there. The directions I got were something along the lines of this. You go down past the old Johnson place and then you take a left. You go past the Seeward place and then both Gurken places, they live in the old Johnson place or something like that. If you just moved into the area, is that kind of direction going to do you any good whatsoever? I smiled and said, "That's nice, but I don't speak native. Can you please tell me how to get there again?"

Our God talks to us this morning about a way to a place. He reminds us the way to this place that he is talking about, his Father's house, is not a set of directions—which is wonderful because we can't worry about getting lost because we are not following the directions well enough and getting there doesn't rely on our ability. Instead, the way to this place is Jesus Christ himself. This morning, we who have gathered here, we know the way. We know who Jesus is and what he has done for us. That's why we are here. You know the way.

This morning we are reminded that the way, Jesus Christ, leads. He leads to heaven and the Father. We are also reminded of an incredible truth this morning that he enables us to do more than we could ask for or imagine. He enables us to do great things because we know the way.

The words I read to you are familiar words, aren't they? They are words that have comforted Christians throughout the ages, since they were first spoken—words that point us to the truth that it's not us or our ability, but it's our God who is the way, the truth and the life. Our God brings us to our Father's house and into heaven. Do you remember the context in which these words were spoken? It was Maundy Thursday. They were in the Upper Room. They were celebrating the Passover. Less than 24 hours later, Jesus would be in a cold, dark, dank tomb. So what does he talk about to those he loves? He says, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled.*" He had told them that soon he would be gone. He had told them they would see him no longer. He had told them that one of their group would deny him. He had told Peter that he would deny him and that another one of their group would betray him. Can you imagine that they were a little troubled?

The word troubled—the picture behind it is like water that is crashing on rocks. It is spraying everywhere, it is swirling and churning. Don't let your heart be churning and troubled and swirling and spraying—that's exactly what their hearts must have felt like. The one they loved was going to be gone. They didn't know what to make of everything that he was saying, so Jesus, in his love for them, spells it out for them again. When they still don't get it and Thomas says, "*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so*

how can we know the way?" Jesus says it very clearly. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Jesus did not say I show the way, like a second Moses. He said, *"I am the way."* He didn't say I have truth like another Elijah and I will teach it to you. He said, *"I am the truth."* He didn't say I offer to you or I will lead you into eternal life like the apostles would. He said, *"I am the life."* Not A life, not A way or not A truth, but THE WAY, THE TRUTH and THE LIFE. Not one of many, but the only way into the Father's house, the only way into heaven, is through Jesus' life and death.

God has to make this known to us because on our own, we could not know it. We couldn't come to decide this. We couldn't come to rationalize this that some unemployed carpenter died some 2000 years ago and now that affects me today. God's Spirit has to touch our hearts and lead us to believe what we could never believe on our own. He does it for infants like he did this morning, and he does it for older people as well. His Spirit touches our hearts and leads us to believe that Jesus is THE WAY. This way leads to heaven as a certainty. *"Do not let your hearts be troubled... I am going there to prepare a place for you... I will come back and take you to be with me..."* Things are going to happen immediately for the disciples that would lead them to wonder, but he kept pointing them back to this truth. He is the way, the truth and the life.

Things are going to happen in our life that, at times are going to lead us to wonder. We know Jesus is the way. We know that he has won heaven for us. At times we face uncertainties, anxieties and worries that are going to lead us to look around in different directions for help just because we are sinful human beings. There are things that are going to make our hearts be troubled or churning or swirling. God wants us to remember that he lived and died so that we don't have to be troubled. So that we know that he is the way and he will take us to heaven. Don't let your hearts be troubled.

The loss of a loved one can be troubling. The loss of health for ourselves or a loved one can be troubling. The uncertainty of what the future may bring because things are no longer the way they once were can bring us trouble and uncertainty. It does not matter which one we face right now. It does not matter which one we face tomorrow or in the future. The God who loved us enough to live and die in our place is at our side loving us, walking with us and saying to us as he holds our hand and strokes it, "Don't let your heart be troubled. I am the way to heaven and I love you that intensely that I took your sins away." Jesus is the way. He does it all for us. We don't have to worry about following directions, doing enough ourselves, being good enough, or having done enough so that he will forgive us. He has forgiven us.

He has taken away our sins and now we can share that truth with one another. When others among us are faced with uncertainty and difficulty we don't just say, "Hang in there, it will get better." Or say, "That's too bad." We have the ability to say to one another, "God loves you. God died for you. Jesus Christ is with you, and he will never leave you." We have a power that passes all understanding that we can speak.

Our Lord reminds us of that today. Not only is it incredible that our God loves us this much, that this close to his death he is worried about comforting us—he also tells us

that he is going to do incredible things through us. As the disciples are struggling with, “*show us the Father and that will be enough for us*”, he tells them again, “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*” “I and the Father are one”—this is in essence what he is saying. He says, “If you can’t believe it because I have told you it, then at least believe it on having seen all of these miracles that I have done.” Then he says, “Those miracles aren’t really that much compared to”—now here is one of the most incredible statements you will probably ever hear—“all those miracles that I have done aren’t that much compared to what I am going to do through you.”

Does that make any sense to you? Jesus raised the dead, healed the blind, made the deaf hear and the mute speak. Jesus cast out demons. Jesus did all of these incredible things. He read the thoughts of people and answered what they had thought in their head and not spoken. Now he says to each one of you here that believe that he is your Savior, that you will do greater things than those—that he will do it through you. Do you believe that? Do you really believe that God can do greater things than what he did through Jesus—through you?

That is exactly what he says this morning. “*He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*” As you and I live in this world, God’s comfort is not just for us to rejoice in ourselves, but it is for us to share. As we share it with one another, those who already believe, and as we share it with those who don’t believe, God does greater things through us. We might say we don’t see any healings, we don’t see this or that, but the greater things are not just these physical things. Things in this world are going to come and go. We live in a sinful world. There are going to be the results of sin around us at all times. Heartache and heartbreak and broken bones and everything else in this side of heaven, but the greater things that God equips you and I to do, and he equips us to do as a congregation, focuses on the resurrection. Jesus was saying all of these things in the shadow of the cross. We say all these things that God has done for us in the shadow of the empty tomb. We get to tell people that death has been defeated! We get to be the ones that share the gospel message so that God takes people who are on the express escalator to hell and turns them around and puts them in heaven. He does it through your voice and my voice.

God does greater things through us. If we are going to sit back all the time and say, “No he doesn’t. We can’t do that as individuals. I am a frail jar of clay. I don’t speak well. My grammar stinks. I get all sweaty and nervous and I can’t say the right thing at the right time. I can’t even answer the questions on Jeopardy, how am I going to tell people about going to heaven?” God has said you can. If we say as a congregation that we are too small, we are too this, we are too that, we can’t do these things. God has said we can, because Jesus is the way. He has done all of this for us, and he is the one who will enable us to do more than we can ask for or imagine. This is the incredible nature of our God. He has said it to us. If we doubt it, we are calling God a liar.

You can call me a liar all you want. But you are never going to win the argument with God if you call him a liar. He has said he will do these things through people like you and me. So point each other to Jesus as the way. Strengthen each other in Jesus as the truth. Lead others to see that Jesus and Jesus alone is the life, then God is doing these great things through us.