

JOHN 14:1–11. (EHV)

“Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am. You know where I am going, and you know the way.” “Lord, we don’t know where you are going,” Thomas replied, “so how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. If you know me, you would also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” “Lord,” said Philip, “show us the Father, and that is enough for us.” “Have I been with you so long,” Jesus answered, “and you still do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I am telling you I am not speaking on my own, but the Father who remains in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me. Or else believe because of the works themselves.”

It’s May 7. Less than two weeks left of school. Then comes summer break. It’s a time not only to play and hang out with friends at your home or their home or around town, but also a time when families love to go on vacation.

When you go on vacation, there are two main questions to ask besides, “What do we need to bring?” Those two questions are: Where are we going? And how are we going to get there?

Jesus’s words here lead us to ask these same two questions with regard to our life as a whole: Where am I going? And how do I get there? Only in this case, we first need to know the way before we can be certain of the goal.

1. The Way

On Holy Thursday, Jesus tried to answer these two questions in the normal order, first telling the disciples where they were going. But when he did that, Thomas replied, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” So Jesus needed to tell Thomas and the other disciples what the way was. And he did so very straightforwardly: “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.”

Jesus is the way to life’s goal. When we are asking ourselves, “How are we going to get there?” with a vacation destination, we have to ask some related questions: Are we going to drive or fly? If we fly, which airport are we going to fly out of? Which airline are we going to take? How many layovers will there be, and where? If we drive, are we going to take the fastest route, or a more scenic or more economical route? The answers to these questions can result in a number of different ways to get to the same destination. But Jesus says that he is the only way, if our lives are to have any real direction, any worthwhile destination or goal.

This shouldn’t be all that surprising, because even with earthly routes, the routes can often be narrowed down to a single way. If I want to go to Wisconsin, I can’t go west. Now you might want to be a smart aleck and say, “Well, technically you could. You’d just have to encircle most of the world.” But no, I couldn’t, and most of you couldn’t either, because then we

wouldn't be able to afford to go to Wisconsin. If I want to go to Canada, I can't go east, west, or south; I have to go north.

Jesus being the only way also shouldn't be all that surprising because, if we know Jesus, we know that his religion differs radically from all other religions on the face of the earth. When I taught religion to students at a Lutheran high school, I sometimes used to start out by pointing out to them that all religious questions basically boil down to two. First, how do I know that Christianity is the only true religion? And second, how do I know that, out of all the different Christian denominations, my denomination is the most faithful to Christianity?

The answer to the first question is actually quite simple. We know that Christianity is the only true religion because it's the only historical religion, and it's the only religion of its kind. It's the only historical religion in that the stories it presents as historical events are confirmed by other historical records and archeological finds. The Assyrian king Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem and his failure to take the city are confirmed by Sennacherib's Prism. You can read about King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and Caesar Augustus of Rome in other histories. In our Bible study on Acts last week, we talked about how there is even archeological evidence for some of the characters you wouldn't think there would be evidence for. I read a book a few years ago, written by a man who doesn't even believe in Jesus, who showed that the biblical account of Joseph and his brothers is true by showing the archeological evidence for where they lived and were buried in Egypt. Other religions either have history with little significance, like the history of Buddha, or are founded on myths with no historical evidence to corroborate them, like Mormonism with its claim that Jesus spent time in America, or they deliberately eliminate parts of their so-called holy books because they are ashamed of some of the things they have taught, like Islamic leaders have done with parts of the Koran. Christianity is also the only historical religion in that everything we teach now, if we're being faithful to Scriptures, is something that Christians have taught going all the way back to Pentecost.

And Christianity is the only religion of its kind. All other religions, and even false versions of Christianity, put the burden of finding peace with God and assurance about the afterlife on you—your acts of kindness, your pilgrimages, your prayers, your fasting, your following of religious rites and rules. Only in Christianity is peace with God and eternal life a free gift that rests entirely not on your work, but on the work of God's Son.

We see that one-of-a-kind aspect of the way of Christ here. Jesus says, "Believe in God; believe also in me." He can tell us to direct the same attitude of the heart to God and him, because he is God. Jesus reinforces this again later when he says that if we have seen him, we have seen the Father, and that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. It is precisely because he is both true man and true God that we know his life and death counted for all people.

Jesus says, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." He reveals that, as true God, he not only has amazing attributes, but *is* his attributes. Jesus is not just a guide or way-shower; he *is* the way. His word is not just true; he *is* the truth. He is not just living or a life-giver; he *is* the life.

No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. There are not many paths to God. There is one—Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life through faith. When we believe in him, we travel the road he traveled. When we believe his word, we know the truth. When we believe in him, we partake of his life.

For life here and hereafter, start and end with Jesus. He is the way, the only way.

2. The Goal

Now that we know the way, we can pay better attention to what Jesus says about the goal to which he leads. “Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.”

When you trust in Jesus, you travel a road that leads to a place that Jesus himself has prepared for us. This place as a whole, his Father’s house, is subdivided into two classifications. First Jesus says it consists of many mansions. The Greek word really just means rooms or spaces, but “mansions” does convey for us that these rooms are lavish and expansive. Jesus does not tell us if everyone gets their own room, or how many people there are to a room. He just tells us that there are many.

He then tells us that within these mansions or rooms he is going to prepare a place for us. This seems to be more individualized. It reminds me of an old television show, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, where a team would interview all the members of a family in need, send them on a vacation, and then, while they were on vacation, build them a home tailored exactly to their needs. The family would basically come back to a mansion. Within that mansion were many rooms, many of them for common use by all the members of the family. But the individual members also each had their own place, their bedroom, that was built with just that person in mind.

Jesus knows how to build as God. He knows how to build as a human; he doubtless worked under his earthly father Joseph as a carpenter before he began his ministry. He knows us better than we know ourselves. If he is preparing a place for us, we can only begin to imagine what that place looks like.

Both of these sub-classifications, mansions or rooms and places, fall under a larger umbrella concept that defines the place as a whole, the place to which all those who believe in God and believe also in Jesus are going. Jesus describes the place as a whole as simply the place where he and his Father are. “In *my Father’s house* are many mansions.” “No one comes *to the Father*, except through me.” “I will come again and take you *to be with me*, so that you also may be *where I am*.” We call it heaven, but the term doesn’t do us any good if we don’t know what heaven is. Heaven is the place where God the Father and Jesus are, the place where we will be with them and see them as they really are, see them face to face.

That might sound boring, but it’s not. That might sound like it will get old, but it won’t. The sight of God in all his glory is the most beautiful sight you can possibly see. And unlike other beautiful sights, which lose the sparkle of their beauty the longer they are experienced and the more familiar they become to us, every second we behold God face to face will be the same stunning sensation we had when we saw him for the first time our first moment in heaven. Whether you’re in the larger room or in your particular place in heaven, you will see Jesus your Savior and be with him.

Half of that beauty will be Jesus looking at you in return. After all, do you know the context in which you would normally hear these words at the time Jesus said them? “I am going

to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.” These are the words a husband would say to his wife when he became betrothed to her. Before the multi-day marriage feast, it was his job to go and prepare a place for both of them to live. But precisely because he was already betrothed to her, that is, legally married to her, it would be unthinkable for him to go away and not come back. No, once he finished preparing a home, he would come and get his bride and bring her to their new home.

Jesus is saying these words to us. This is one of the reasons we call the Church the Bride of Christ. He is our husband. He came calling on us and wooing us with the good news of his love for us. He draws us to himself through Word and sacraments. He enters into a marriage contract with us in baptism, except the contract isn’t built on our mutual promises, only his. He reaffirms that contract through his Word and his Holy Supper. And once he enters into that contract with us, through faith in him we, like a bride, know that he is preparing a home for us and will come back for us. And when he does, we will be with him forever and he with us.

So when we see Jesus in all his glory, it won’t just be the handsomeness of his glory that enchants us. It will also be that in his glory he will be looking at us with greater love than we have ever had for him, the fact that he loved us and chose us when we were unlovable and undeserving, the fact that even though there will be thousands upon thousands of people there, when I look at him and he smiles at me, the look he has won’t just say, “I’m glad you’re *all* here,” but, “I’m glad *you* are here.”

You’ve *never* been to a destination like this one, brothers and sisters. Our national parks? Disappointing, compared to this. Europe’s cathedrals? Child’s work. The northern lights? A live concert? The Super Bowl? Easter morning? Only a drop compared to the ocean of that place.

Imagine living in a world where everyone has heard about the ultimate vacation destination. But no one knows exactly where it is or how to get there. Every map has a section that’s blurred out or greyed out. That’s how it is with us by nature. Everyone has a sense that there’s a heaven and a hell, and they want to go to heaven, the ultimate destination. But no one knows how to get there.

Through faith in Christ you have the map that’s not greyed out. “You know where I am going, and you know the way,” Jesus said. Thanks to him, that’s true. We are going to his home, and the home of his Father, and he himself is the way there. We know it, because he is risen. He is risen indeed! Amen.