

John 14:1-14

Easter 5A + May 14, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
Stay

The Word of the Lord from John 14:6: Jesus said, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

And because Jesus is risen from the dead, I say this to you: Stay.

Our Gospel lesson is from a critical time. It's the Last Supper, and the night is well along. There isn't much time left, and so the Teacher is giving His last lesson before He's arrested, scourged and crucified. If there's ever a time for the disciples to be top-notch students on their toes, it's now. But they're not.

As for Thomas, he's not confused about much – except for the work of the Messiah and how He saves! Jesus has just told them, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." They do know the way to where He is going, because He's told them repeatedly: He's going by way of the cross. He's going to go die for the sins of the world, that whoever believes in Him might have eternal life. He's told them several times, and so He says once again, "You know the way to where I am going."

But Thomas doesn't understand – or doesn't want to. He objects, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?" Two sentences, two problems. First, Thomas doesn't see a route to heaven that goes by way of crucifixion – he can't imagine how Jesus can win any victory by suffering and death. After all, God Himself has declared that anyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed. Second, Thomas doesn't get the Gospel. Apparently, he thinks that Jesus is going to show them a path to heaven, and so they'll get there by following Him and doing what He does. He should know better: Jesus keeps telling them that they can't go with Him. But Thomas doesn't get it, and following Jesus to a cross certainly isn't inviting. So he says, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus responds, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." That, my friends, is a fine feast of good news. Jesus says, "I am the Way." Not, "I will show you the way," but "*I am* the Way." In other words, the path to heaven isn't a matter of "follow the leader" and do what Jesus does. Jesus is the Way – the route, the path – to heaven in the flesh. He's going the way of the cross so you don't have to. If you have Him, you have everywhere He has gone. If you have Him, you have His life, His death, and His resurrection. So Jesus doesn't say to Thomas, "This is where you have to go." He's saying, "I'm going to the cross and My Father's wrath so that you don't have to. If you've got a share in Me, you've got a share in My death. If you've got Me, you don't have to die for sin yourself."

Not only does Jesus say, "I am the Way," but He also says, "I am the Truth and the Life." The Gospel is not a search for secret knowledge, so that you're saved if you're smart enough and know enough. The Gospel is Jesus, crucified and risen for you. If you have Him, you have the truth. And if you have Him, you have life.

So where Thomas essentially asks, "Where do I have to go and what do I have to do to get to heaven?", Jesus says, "I'm doing it all for you. If you've got Me, you've got heaven. If you're with Me, stay with Me. Don't move."

So I say to you: if you've got Jesus – if you are where He is, then don't move. Stay.

Then there's Philip, who's confused as well. Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except through Me," and adds, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you *do* know Him and have seen Him." In response, Philip says, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." It seems that he's saying, "All right, Jesus, You're the Way. But all we see of the way right now is a cross and no happy ending. We'd like some assurance: if You're on Your way to the Father, we'd like to see Him. We'd like to see some glory and power and verification that the Father is in on Your plan."

I get that. We naturally look for glory and power to get things done. When we don't see answers, we want a sign from God, not to live by faith. Apart from faith, it doesn't make sense that Jesus would win the victory by weakness and death. Plus, God the Father has made Himself known to the disciples before: He's spoken at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, both times saying, "This is My beloved Son." That very holy week, He has declared from heaven that His name will be glorified at the cross (John 12:28). So now that the crucifixion is just hours away, I understand that Philip would like some more divine confirmation that the salvation of the world is going according to plan – and an appearance by God the Father would do the trick nicely.

Jesus says, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know *Me*, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority, *but the Father who dwells in Me does His works.*"

At this crucial moment, Jesus brings in the mystery of the Trinity. The Son is not the Father and the Father is not the Son, but the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son. If you've got the Son, you've got the Father too; and as Jesus will go on to teach before His betrayal, you've also got the Holy Spirit. He declines Philip's request to see the Father, because the Father makes Himself known through the Son.

Add what Jesus says to Philip to what He already said to Thomas, and you've got great news. If you have Jesus, you not only have the Way to heaven, the Truth and the Life; but you've also got the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. If you don't have Jesus, then you don't have the Father either. It's impossible to know God apart from His Son, as Jesus Himself affirms by saying, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." So I say to you: if you've got Jesus – if you are where He is, then don't move. Stay. Because if you have Jesus, you have all that you need for eternal life.

No wonder Jesus says, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me."

The next point to cover, of course, is, "How do you know you've got Jesus?" You can run into all sorts of people who say, "I know I've got Jesus because I feel Him in my heart." However, you can run into people who are living in all sorts of manifest, unrepented sins who say this; and where they have welcomed sin without repentance, they have asked Jesus to leave. Whatever warmth they feel in their heart, it is not the Lord. You can also run into all sorts of people who are enduring turmoil and all kinds of suffering, and they don't feel anything good in their heart whatsoever, or else they have no energy left to feel anything at all. Be careful, my friends, and be warned: you do not know you have Jesus because you feel Him in your heart. In

fact, the Bible is quite clear in Jeremiah 17:9 when it says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

In other words, don't trust your heart. Your heart is part of your sinful flesh. The one who lives without repentance doesn't have Jesus, even if he really feels like he does. Likewise, the one who feels nothing good – or nothing at all – because of suffering may very well have Jesus.

Jesus doesn't say that you can find Him your heart. He says that you can find Him in His Word. When you hear the Word proclaimed from Scripture, it is Jesus who is speaking. If you receive His Word, you have received Him. If you reject His Word, you have rejected Him. If you say, "I have Jesus, but I don't accept what the Bible says," then you simply don't have Jesus.

So let's return to the example of the one who is suffering, who feels nothing good or feels nothing at all. Let's say that it's you – sooner or later, it will be because this dying world is awful and evil has no favorites. If you can feel nothing, how do you know that you have Jesus? You know because He said He has you. He said, "I baptize you." He has adopted you as His own child and promised to be faithful to you. If you don't "feel" Jesus near, then you must ask yourself: which is more certain, your feelings or His promises?

Of course, you weren't baptized yesterday: it's been a while. How do you know that He's still with you, besides His baptismal promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age?" Because He's still speaking to you in His Word. He keeps giving you His very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Which is more certain, your feelings or His presence and His Word?

By way of analogy, for husbands and wives, there will be some days where you don't particularly feel married. Perhaps you've had an argument, or the pressures of work or some depression are preventing any sort of emotional bond with your spouse. Imagine a moment in such a time where your spouse is in the room speaking to you. You see a ring on your finger. You hear their words, and you can see them in the room. Which is more true: your tired feeling of isolation, or the ring, the words and the one in the room? It's why marriage is to be lived by the vows spoken, not your state of mind on a particular day.

I suppose that, this being Mothers' Day, we could put it this way. Being such a vital and holy vocation, motherhood is always under attack, demeaned and discounted. There are times when moms will go to a happy place in their minds and pretend that they are free of responsibilities for a minute or two. But it doesn't last long, does it? In a short time, there's a voice, usually attached to sticky hands, reminding them that they're moms with things to do. In the case of salvation, the voice is better: it's attached to hands with nail marks, telling you that all has already been done for your salvation. Eternal rest is coming, and eternal *rest* sounds wonderful.

See, which is more true: Jesus' presence in baptism, His Word and His Supper, or your feeling of whether or not He is there?

To put it another way: if you believe that Jesus is present because you feel Him near, you are not living by faith. You're not living by trusting what God tells you, but what your emotions tell you.

To put it a better way, rejoice in how clear and certain is Jesus' presence for you! Whether you feel like you're on top of the world or have one foot buried in your grave, Christ says, "Here I am for you" in His Word and His Sacraments.

And remember: if you have Jesus, you have the Father too.

If you have Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit.

If you have Jesus, you have forgiveness. And life. And salvation.

Oh, and don't forget this last little gem of a promise in our text: Jesus says, "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." This gets misinterpreted, of course: our sinful flesh wants Jesus to say, "I'll give you whatever you want." But He tells us to ask in His name, which is the same thing as saying, "Whatever I promise in My Word is yours, because I've made you My beloved child. Just ask." And what has He promised? For starters, forgiveness, life, salvation. Daily bread, everything you need for this body and life (thought not everything you want or feel you need). Deliverance from trouble and suffering in His time, and His presence and help until that time comes.

If you're where Jesus is, stay. Christianity is really not about a process or a journey: it's about staying with Jesus no matter what journey life takes you on. That doesn't mean that you don't grow or that you can put your faith to bed because you've got it made. It's not easy to stay with Jesus: the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh are going to do their best to get you to go. There will be a whole bunch of seductive, carnal, entertaining sins carefully designed to lure you away from Jesus. There will be a whole bunch more of brutal, frightening, in-your-face temptations to get you to run away from Jesus.

Don't run. Stay. Stay repentant. Keep getting forgiven. Grow in faith. Live as one baptized. Be alive in Christ, for He has brought you to Himself.

I suppose I'll just throw in here that Luther famously said, "Here I stand," not "Here I go." By the grace of God alone, he'd found Christ and His forgiveness, and he was willing to die rather than lose it again. May it be for us also.

A closing illustration, if you will. Back at the time of the Flood, I imagine that it wasn't too comfortable for Noah and his family on the ark, bobbing up and down in an enclosed space with a whole bunch of animals for a whole bunch of days. If we were to call them on, oh, day #32 to encourage them, what would we say? How about this: "Stay where you are, because that is where the Lord keeps you safe. Deliverance is coming!" So I point you to the Lord's means of grace and say, "Wherever you are and wherever you go, stay. Don't move from the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have Him, it's because the triune God's got you. If He's got you, you have the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Because if He's got you, then you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen