



SAINT LUKE'S

“WAY, TRUTH AND LIFE”

EASTER 5

ACTS 7:55-60

PSALM 31:1-5, 15-16

1 PETER 2:2-10

JOHN 14:1-14

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

MAY 14, 2017

John spends much more time than the other gospels on the Last Supper - five chapters. (In fact, nine of twenty one chapters in the Gospel of John are devoted the Last Supper, death and Resurrection). This famous teaching of Jesus is part of that Farewell Discourse. Jesus is at Table with his disciples. They are under the shadow of the Cross; Jesus has washed their feet; Judas has just dipped his bread in the bowl and identified himself as Jesus' betrayer and gone out. This teaching of Jesus is not on a sunny Galilean hilltop. It is a pastoral word of reassurance in the face of fear of what is coming: his death and their desertion.

Jesus refers to it as night.¹ He is preparing them and he names trust in him as the antidote to their fear but of course that doesn't make their fear go away. Thomas blurts out: *We do not know where you are going and how can we know the way?* It is an ancient fear - of children, of spouses: I am not ready. Don't leave me. Don't die. I am afraid. Sometimes even when we have plans, we can feel profoundly at sea. I remember standing on a train platform one Sunday morning when I was 17. I had stayed overnight with a friend after a party the night before. I had graduated High School and was off to College in a month. Good plans. But that Sunday morning on the train platform I felt so lost. I remember thinking: "Where am I going, really?" I had a sense deep down that what I sought had something to do with that strange experience called Church and that Sunday mornings were meant for more than waiting on train platforms. What I didn't yet understand was that Home is finding our spiritual path.

¹ Jn. 9:4

At every stage of life's journey we can experience fear and uncertainty. From childhood fears to all the uncertainties of adult life: climate change; sickness; losing our job or our homes. The disciples didn't feel ready for what lay ahead. There were moments even Jesus didn't feel ready. Jesus wants to reassure the disciples' anxious hearts that they have seen and know enough to follow him, even when he is no longer with them in the flesh. The disciples are more ready than they know.

We don't have a road map for life. What we are given instead is a person and a relationship. *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.* Christians are people who have discovered that Jesus is their path to God and their anchor in life's storms. The early Christians called their practice "the Way". Jesus makes the Church more than an institution. Jesus makes us into the Body of Christ. When Jesus says that he is the way, the truth the life, this is an invitation not an ultimatum. Jesus invites us to share in his closeness to God. Jesus invites us to sit next to him at God's Table.

Sometimes the second part of Jesus identifying himself as the way, truth, and life has been used as an exclusion clause: *No one comes to the Father except through me.* We grapple with this and so we should. What suffering and violence by Christians this phrase has caused. Conversions at the point of a sword, Crusades, a terrible catalogue of murder in the name of Jesus. Yet Jesus himself has just said: *In my Father's House are many dwelling places,* which sounds inclusive. We often think Jesus means places in Heaven. However, Jesus also refers to the

Temple in Jerusalem as His Father's House.² The disciples, raised in the Hebrew tradition, would have heard this allusion to the Temple. Jesus intends us to hear it too. *In my Father's Temple* there are many more rooms than you think; God is more inclusive and expansive than we may have been taught. Jesus pushes the walls of God's House outwards in this life and the next. To let more people in. Jesus says to the Samaritan woman³ that worshippers of God will worship in spirit and in truth – beyond boundaries that seem absolute but that Jesus jumps over. Jesus' God is an expansive, welcoming, generous God.

So when Jesus says: *No one comes to the Father except through me*, I have come to think of the relationship between Jesus and God the Father as being like light and heat from the Sun.⁴ The heat from the sun is indistinguishable from its source as Jesus emanates from, and is inseparable from, the Father. It is impossible to understand God fully without encountering or “going through” Jesus, as it is impossible to understand the Sun fully without experiencing the light and heat it emits. I think that we cannot get to the heart of God without encountering Jesus whether or not we know Jesus by that Name in this life. Encountering Jesus continues after we die. For some, it will be for the first time. There is no need to tease the persons of the Trinity apart or mathematically apportion the physics of it in order to *experience* Jesus as Way, Truth and Life. Especially when we are afraid and in despair, it is in those times Jesus invites us as he invited the first disciples to trust Him as our Way and Truth and Life.

² Lk. 2:49

³ Jn. 4:24

⁴ St John of the Cross approaches similar imagery in his *Spiritual Canticle* when he describes the soul's union with God

We are in the Easter season. This is the season of Resurrection of Jesus our Lord from the grave, giving all humanity a new future. All the narcissistic presidents and all the corrupt leaders in the world cannot put out the Light and the Hope that Jesus continues to bring. Jesus' own life infiltrates every corner of the universe with joy that does not decay or die. I love this prayer for Sundays – the day of Resurrection, the first day of the week, from our Prayer Book:

O God our King, by the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ on the first day of the week, you conquered sin, put death to flight, and gave us the hope of everlasting life: Redeem all our days by this victory; forgive our sins, banish our fears, make us bold to praise you and to do your will; and steel us to wait for the consummation of your kingdom on the last great Day; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

(BCP 835; Prayer for Sundays)

AMEN

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