

YOU KNOW THE WAY TO WHERE I AM GOING

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 7, 2023

Peter, James, John, and the rest of Jesus band felt lost and confused. Once again on this day, they were left standing there feeling like kindergarteners playing chess against Jesus the Grand Master. Yet again, he was at least ten moves ahead of them. The disciples knew intimately the Jewish society in which they lived and the religion of their day two thousand years ago, but this religious teacher Jesus was regularly throwing them new curveballs.

On this day, Jesus' curveballs began with something to do with what happens after we die. Only his men weren't going to pick up on Jesus coded message. For the disciples, reality after death depended upon whether you followed the teachings of the Pharisees or Sadducees; whether death was death, or, death meant some kind of future resurrection.

As Jesus was teaching them this day, he was speaking about leaving them and going ahead of them to some distant location where he would prepare a place for their arrival. The disciple's thought Jesus was talking about a physical location. But instead, he was referring cryptically to his pending death and going to God's eternal dwelling place – to heaven. Then he said: "you know the way to where I am going."

"You know the way to where I am going." I want to focus on this concept this morning. The disciple Peter had a look of frustration and confusion on his face. He responded: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Good old pragmatic Peter. He must have been thinking; "Well, Jesus, if we're supposed to join you later, you need to at least tell us which interstate and exit to take." But instead, Jesus

answered cryptically; you want to know the road to take to where I am going? Me, I, am the road. I – am the way.

Jesus was speaking metaphorically about a future where all God's children would be together in the Father's divine and glorious presence. And Jesus was the way, the path to follow to get there; his life, his teaching, his presence, his very being. But here's the challenge. What does it mean to follow in Jesus' way? What did it mean to those first disciples? What does it mean to you and me in twenty-first century America? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus' way if you are an Anglican living in twenty-first century Nigeria?

You see, following in the way of Jesus has never been a straightforward static thing. It has always been dynamic. After Jesus, the apostle Paul stepped forward to lead the church. He elaborated further what it looked like to follow in the way of Jesus. Even today in The Episcopal Church, here in the diocese of southwest Florida in Good Shepherd church in Venice, there are various understandings among our parishioners of what it means to live in the way of Jesus.

So, you see, living in the way of Jesus is not a simple straightforward thing. It's not as simple as doing what Jesus did, and believing the teachings as Jesus taught them, and living in our society as Jesus lived in his society. You see, Jesus did the Jesus way in his particular way. The apostle Paul who followed him elaborated further this Jesus way and explained in more detail what the Jesus way meant for him.

Many followers of Christ down through the centuries have followed the way of Jesus as they understood it. Unfortunately, their understanding was at times misguided, and sometimes dangerously so. We see the carnage resulting from their error in the inquisitions and the crusades and the storming of the Capital on January 6, 2021. These misguided

followings in the way of Jesus have resulted in much pain and death and suffering down through the centuries.

So how do you and I live this Jesus way in our church? What guides us? When I first joined a Christian church, I was taught the Jesus way in a more fundamentalist evangelical way. We believed that most people needed to be saved, including Catholics and Episcopalians and Jews and those of other belief systems. We wanted to get everyone else to pray the sinner's prayer and ask Jesus into their heart. In that church foundation I learned the Bible and believed it in a particular completely literal way. Then, as I continued to grow and develop and deepen and pray and read and listen, I began to shift in some of my understanding of this Jesus' way for me.

So, let me ask you. What has informed you in this Jesus way? Has it been certain friends you surround yourself with? Or maybe it is a particular list of teachers or theologians you respect? Or maybe your Jesus way is still influenced by some imperfect teachings and traditions taught you by another Christian denomination when you were growing up. What informs your living out the Jesus way?

Is there a standard, a plumbline or measure that we can use to discern the proper Jesus way for us today? Or are we simply left to follow the whims and wind of change in our society and go along with everything we hear and see in pop culture and in the media and Christian teachers and politicians?

Jesus said that we know the way. God, who resides in the intimate core of our souls knows the Jesus way for us. But we often miss this subtle inner divine leading. We can be distracted from discerning Jesus' way by many things; by a career, or family, or hobbies, or money, or material goods. You see, the cares and worries of this world can at times distract us from

sensing the way. All this noise from life in our American society can drown out the sweet subtle call from God.

Even our religious institutions that are meant to steer us along Jesus' way, can, instead, be another distraction. These things that are meant to lead us along the "way," – like ministering to others in our community and friendships and liturgy and music and teaching, can sometimes distract us from clearly discerning the "way."

Catholic writer and former monk Thomas Moore, in his book "The Soul's Religion" writes about the tension he sometimes experiences between his relationship with the Catholic Church, and his attempt to live Jesus' broader and deeper way. He writes this: "My own Catholicism has deepened and widened so much that I don't fit well in an official Catholic setting. I hope the reader will . . . find my personal background . . . a model of someone on a spiritual odyssey who has not completely abandoned his roots but has revisioned them. While I feel an innate and ineradicable Catholicism in me, I also feel a brotherhood with all sorts of spiritual seekers and explorers."

You see, both Jesus, and Thomas Moore, revisioned their religion, how they followed the Way. They both had a deep rootedness in their religious tradition; for Jesus, it was Judaism; for Moore, it was Catholicism. And yet, neither of them was restricted or limited by their religious tradition. Moore, and Jesus, had found that which was true and lifegiving in their religious tradition, but they were also able to resource that which was outside those bounds of their religion that enabled them to tune into God's homing beacon in their soul.

Jesus was able to do this by regularly removing himself from all distractions around him. We are told that he regularly spent the night in prayer or found a solitary place to pray. Paul began his ministry by going alone out into the desert. Thomas Moore had similar habits as well.

Is there a plumbline or standard to guide you and me in discerning how to live out this Jesus way? Yes, there is. It is the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus' way of love. If how I have been living out this Jesus way is not about love, but instead is more fear based, then my way is not the Jesus way. Throughout most of the church year in this church I end the Sunday service with these words: "Life is short. And we don't have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make this journey with us. So, be swift to love. And make haste to be kind." This is the standard that must guide us in this Jesus way – love.

As Jesus said; you know the way.