

And You Know the Way

Hespeler, May 3, 2026 © Scott McAndless – Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:8-15, 7:55-60, Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16, 1 Peter 2:2-10, John 14:1-14

According to the Gospel of John, in the middle of the Last Supper, Jesus turned to the disciples and he said, **“And you know the way to the place where I am going.”**

And what has the church responded to that ever since? “Oh yes,” the church has declared, “we know where you are going, Jesus. You are going to heaven. You are going to a place of bliss.

“And because we know the way to that place where you are going, we will control who gets to follow it. We will tell everyone what the way is and, unless they all listen to us and do exactly what we say, they will never get there.”

Sacraments

The church hasn’t always agreed among its various branches on what that way is and exactly how you have to follow it. Some churches will insist that the way to where Jesus went involves you participating in all of the rituals and sacraments of the church, and if you fail to do them all or to do them properly, or if you haven’t participated recently when you die, well, then you can’t follow in the way.

Knowledge

Other churches have insisted that the way actually involves knowledge. You have to know certain secrets that have been passed down to you through the church, and that is what allows you to follow in the way.

Various churches have pointed to different pieces of knowledge. Some have said that you have to know certain things about yourself, such as that you have a spark of the divine within you. Others say you have to learn things about the hidden structure of the universe. Others keep the mysteries that they say you have to understand so well hidden that no one outside of those church has ever been able to discover them.

But whatever specific pieces of knowledge they will point to, they know that knowledge itself is the way and that they are the ones who have control over who can access it.

Faith

And then came the Protestant Reformation. The Protestants finally figured out what the way was to get to the place where Jesus was going. And they knew that the way was through faith. It was all a matter of what you believed.

And so the churches began to map out the way for true followers of Jesus by writing out all of the creeds and the confessions of faith that you had to believe. And if you didn’t believe the things that the church told you to believe – if you were not a proper Five Point Calvinist or a Pre-Tribulation Post-Millennialist or whatever else your church told you to be – then you could not follow in the way.

Relationship

But that was not the only way that the church came up with. Evangelistic churches finally came along to explain what



the “true” way was. They said it was actually about forming a relationship with Jesus. You had to do that by responding to the message of the Gospel in the way that they told you – often by praying a particular prayer.

So, yes, down through the years, the church has certainly decided that it knew exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said, **“And you know the way to the place where I am going.”**

Not Completely Wrong

I don’t mean to suggest that the church has been utterly wrong in the ways that it has told people to follow in the way of Jesus. Obviously following in the way of Jesus has a great deal to do with questions of Christian practice, knowledge, faith and personal devotion.

But I can’t help but think that we may have made a mistake in so confidently teaching people that we know exactly how they ought to follow Jesus to where he was going. And a big part of that is that we decided that we needed to be in control of who gets to follow in the way of Jesus.

Thomas’ Wise Answer

Thomas was one of the disciples present when Jesus said that. And I note that that was not his reaction. He did not jump up and say, “Oh yes, I know exactly what to tell people to do.” He hesitated to take that kind of control over people.

In fact, he spoke up in true humility to say, **“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”** And I cannot help but think that perhaps the church would do well to learn something from Thomas and his response. Thomas seems to have been a pretty smart guy.

What Jesus was Talking About

When Jesus spoke about the way to the place where he was going, it turns out that he wasn’t talking primarily about practices, or knowledge, or even faith or a personal relationship. He was talking about something much more essential than that.

And so Jesus explained, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** And I realize that ever since this Gospel was written, people have assumed that they understood what Jesus meant by that.

They have assumed, in fact, that Jesus meant whatever their particular church has decided that it means to follow in the way of Jesus. But I think it is time for us to step back from all of those assumptions about what Jesus meant and look at what he said. I suspect that the way of Jesus may be somewhat simpler than we have been led to believe.

I Am the Way

Jesus said, **“I am the way.”** And that means that we need to set aside all of our assumptions about what we have to do to follow in that way. It is not about what we do for Jesus or how we open that way. It is about what Jesus has done for us and about the way that Jesus has opened.

He said, **“I am the way.”** That means that it is actually not about the destination. Following in the way of Jesus is not about getting you to some heavenly bliss someday. Yes, that may be the final stop on the subway track, but such a destination is not the primary focus.

If Jesus is himself the way, then it is much more about travelling moment by moment and day by day in fellowship with Christ. It is about living your best life with Jesus now and not waiting for something beyond this world.

An Encounter

In fact, if you want to talk about the destination of this way at all, you ought not to speak of it in terms of a place but in terms of an encounter. The end of the way is the encounter with God. That is what Jesus has to mean when he says, **“No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

But here is the thing about that. That encounter with the Father does not lie only at the end of the way. Jesus makes it clear that you don't have to wait until the end of the journey to meet the Father because, as he repeats several times, **“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”**

So, God is not just someone waiting for us at the end of this way. God is the one we encounter on the way. We encounter God in the one who *is* the way for us.

I Am the Truth

Jesus also says, **“I am the truth.** That means that following in the way is not dependent on the knowledge you accumulate. Yes, you can study the scriptures in all the original languages. You can absorb vast books of theology. And if those things deepen your appreciation of the way that you are on, that is all wonderful. But *you* don't hold on to the truth, no matter how much you know. It is the truth that holds on to you.

Our Illusion of Control

We sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that, if we can come up with a description or definition of something, we control it. I often hear people say that, because they have a concept of God, they know what God can and cannot do. “If God inspires a piece of Scripture,” someone might say, “that Scripture has to be literally true because God can't lie.”

Do you really think that, because you have a definition of God, you can tell God what kinds of literature God can inspire? It doesn't work like that. Your concept of God is just that – *your* concept. It is always going to be imperfect and incomplete because it is a human concept.

That is what Jesus means when he says **“I am the truth.”** The truth about God, about the world or your path along the way is not limited by your human understanding. It is all wrapped up in the person of Jesus and it is always bigger than anything your human mind can grasp.

I Am the Life

And Jesus also says, **“I am the life.”** That is good news because it means that your life is not bound by the limitations of your human body or the human experience of time. Your life is as boundless as the person of Christ.

So, Jesus is saying all of that and more in this incredible statement. But we also need to take note of what he is not saying. He is not offering Thomas or any of the other disciples control over who gets to follow in this way.

The One True Church

As I have already noted, Christians down through the centuries have tried to be the boss of who gets to follow in the way of Christ.

There is one old cartoon that illustrates this perfectly. It features a Sunday School teacher standing at front of his class. On the blackboard is a diagram illustrating the history of the church.

There is one original branch, which then divides again and again to represent the various divisions and disagreements of the church over the centuries, until, at the right end of the board, there are so many different churches that the options fill the entire height of the graphic.

The teacher points to one tiny branch on the edge of the board labelled “our church.” He announces to the class, “Fortunately, with the founding of our church, the true and correct way to follow Jesus was finally found. Unfortunately, everyone else has been consigned to hell.”

We Don't Set the Limits

That is how we have thought about it – as if there is one true way and we have to be the ones to figure out what that way is. But Jesus says, **“I am the way.”** You cannot limit any person, much less a divine person, with your doctrines, teachings and confessions of faith. As much as we try to limit what it means for someone to follow in that way, if the way is Jesus himself, all our human limitations will only end up making us look foolish.

In fact, whenever we judge anyone and say that they cannot be saved because of our understanding of the way of Christ, we fail to appreciate what Jesus is saying here. Yes, Jesus does say, **“No one comes to the Father except through me,”** and that might seem to us to exclude all kinds of people.

Jesus Gets to Decide

But again, we aren't the ones who get to define what it means to come through Jesus. Jesus is the way; only he gets to define that. The Bible, and especially the Apostle Paul, teaches that the only way to come to God is through faith in Christ. But again, we don't get to define the full meaning of faith, not even with our doctrines and creeds. Ultimately, it is Jesus who gets to decide who is placing their trust in him.

And, from everything that I have learned about Jesus in my studies of the gospels, I believe that he would define that in very expansive and grace-filled ways. I don't think that Jesus is the sort to exclude someone just because they don't sign off on some doctrine or even because they don't claim the name of Christian.

We Are Not the Way

But, of course, that is just my thinking and you may understand it differently. That is okay. My point is that all of our understandings of such things are limited and may be flawed. And that matters less than you might think because we are not the way; Jesus is.

In the midst of the Last Supper, John tells us that Jesus said, **“And you know the way to the place where I am going.”** And the more I think about that saying, the more I find myself sympathizing with Thomas and replying, **“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”**

But Thomas wasn't expressing frustration or anger when he said that. I think he was expressing exactly the kind of humility that Jesus was looking for in those who would join him in the way.