



The Episcopal Church of  
St. John the Baptist

## **You Know the Way**

Sermon for Sunday, May 10, 2020 (Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A)

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“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

Jesus says this to his disciples the night before his death, anticipating their grief and confusion after their hopes and expectations of him will be shattered when he is brutally murdered before their eyes.

He spends a long time with them that night, trying to prepare them for what ultimately no one can ever be fully prepared for – the piercing pain of loss.

As they stare over the edge of the precipice into the unknown, the disciples are looking for certainty. They want a road map, a set of instructions to get them to where Jesus is going. They are terrified at the thought of losing him, of not knowing where to go or what to do without him.

We know what that feels like, don't we? In the face of uncertainty, we look for specific guidance and directions to help ease our anxiety. I know I've been doing that during the pandemic, as I check the county health department's website multiple times a week, just to see if anything has changed, looking for specific guidance from those who are leading the way for us through these uncertain times.

Jesus tells the disciples that **they already know the way** to the place he is going, but they aren't able to fully trust that.

“Lord, we do NOT know where you are going,” Thomas protests. You can just hear the anxiety in his voice. “What do you mean, ‘we know the way to the place you are going???’ We have no clue here! How can we know the way?”

“I am the way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus says.

“You DO know the way,” he's reiterating to them. “You know ME, and I am the way. Not a road map with specific directions, not a structured plan with clear phases and bullet points, just me.”



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As writer Debie Thomas puts it, “just the messy, intimate, ever evolving, and often confusing business of relationship. Of trust, patience, and vulnerability.”

Although this line of scripture has often been cited as part of a certain and specific “roadmap to salvation” – believe in your heart and confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and you will be saved – in the context in which this passage appears, Jesus wasn’t offering the disciples a formula for “how to get to heaven in 3 easy steps.” He was inviting them to trust that they already knew all they needed to know, that in seeing him they had seen the Father, that all they needed was to keep following him – even when they were afraid they wouldn’t be able to see or hear him anymore.

When we don’t know where we’re going, we have to remember that Jesus knows the way, that Jesus IS the way. Jesus’s “way” is not like a maze, a path with twists and turns that lead nowhere and trap us in dead-ends, producing anxiety and confusion as we try to find our way out. Jesus’s “way” is more like a labyrinth, a way that seems to be going in all over the place in aimless directions but that is actually leading us with purpose toward the center, whether we are aware of it or not.

Pastor Elizabeth Lovell Milford of Hertiage Presbyterian Church in Ackworth, GA, observes that in calling himself ‘the way,’ “Jesus was calling the disciples and us not to run through some crazy maze where he’s the exit, but rather to journey with him to the center of the heart of God, where he had created space for us to rest and be held in God’s grace.”

In what ways is Jesus inviting us to trust that we already know the way today, in the midst of the pandemic? I’d like to close with the words of Debie Thomas from the online magazine [JourneywithJesus.net](http://JourneywithJesus.net), who says it better than I could:

“Maybe it feels like a tall order right now, to “not let your heart be troubled.” To trust that you *do* in fact know the way — the quiet, unglamorous, risky, but ultimately life-giving way of Jesus. *But you do.* Like Thomas, like Philip, like Peter, like the others, you know Jesus. You know his life. You know his love. You know his death. You know his resurrection. You know what it is to hunger for him, to seek him, to listen for him, to hope in him. You know the way.

No, the way isn’t what we thought it was going to be. The way is demanding. The way is precarious. The way takes time. But the invitation of this Gospel is *still* an invitation to confidence. Not because we’re experts at finding God, but because God has always and already found us. With every unknowing we embrace, God finds us one more time.”