

Disciples' Questions: How Can We Know the Way?

John 14:4-7

John Breon

We're looking at questions disciples asked and answers Jesus gave. There are four of these questions or interruptions in this section. Let's recap. Jesus and the disciples are in the upper room. Jesus is going to the cross to lay down his life the next day. He has washed the disciples' feet. Judas has gone out into the night. Jesus has told them that he's going away and that they should love each other as he loves them.

There's a sense of loss and grief in this passage. Jesus himself has been troubled in spirit (13:21) as he predicted that one of his disciples would betray him. That disturbed the disciples. Even more disturbing were his words a little later, "I am going away and you can't come with me right now" (13:33).

Jesus went on to talk about the new commandment to love one another. But all Peter heard was, "I am going away." Finally Peter bursts out, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus didn't answer directly, but said, "You can't come now, but you will come later." Peter boldly promised to follow Jesus to his death. But Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him before morning.

Immediately following these troubling words about Jesus' departure and Peter's denial, Jesus says to them all, "Don't let your hearts be troubled." He calls the disciples to renew their faith: "Believe in God, believe also in me." They need faith in Jesus, faith in God, to deal with the loss they're feeling and the failures they'll endure.

Then Jesus gives words of assurance: "In my Father's house are many dwelling places." With God there's plenty of room for everyone. All who will come will find a place.

Jesus finally tells them that he's going to the Father to prepare a place for them. Then he promises that he'll come again to take them so they can be with him where he is. Jesus has a prepared place for a prepared people. He prepares a place for us by coming to us and preparing us for life

with him. Having told the disciples where he's going, Jesus says that they know the way to where he's going.

Thomas speaks for them now. They're still not sure where Jesus is going. So he basically asks again, "Lord, where are you going?" Then he adds, "How can we know the way?"

This gives Jesus the opportunity to make a powerful statement: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." He says, I am going to the Father and I am the way for you to go to the Father. This is one of several "I am" statements of Jesus in John's Gospel. Remember what God said to Moses at the burning bush, when Moses asked God's name. "I Am that I Am." Jesus is speaking for God. He speaks God's name and claims it for himself. He is God with us, God in the flesh, speaking to us.

Jesus is the way to relationship with the Father. He takes us to the Father's house, now and in the future. Jesus is the truth because he reveals the Father, he speaks the Father's words and does the Father's works. Jesus is the life and he gives life from the Father. Again, he does what the Father does. Jesus is the truth, Jesus is the life, that gives us the way to live. Jesus is the true way to life and he's the way to true life.

Jesus is the way to God. An essential part of our faith is that Jesus is unique. God has done in Jesus what he's done nowhere else. Jesus shows us God in a way no one else does. This raises some questions in relation to people of other faiths and we need to recognize the danger of bigotry and arrogance. But there's nothing arrogant about Jesus. This One who is the way is the one who brings grace and truth, who loves and heals, who serves as a slave, who lays down his life.

We don't figure God out, we don't climb up to God on our own. Only God can reveal God. Only God can open the way to God. And that's what God has done. Recall the beginning of John's Gospel. The Word was with God and the Word was God. God created through the Word. Life is in the Word and that life gives light to everyone. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

People may not know the name of Jesus, the historic person who is the incarnation of God. But God's Word and life and light, God's Spirit is at work all over the world. People can respond in some way to whatever light of God is available to them. And we'll all be held accountable for our response to the light we've received.

Sometimes we hear about missionaries going into a new place and telling people about Jesus. The people respond, "So that's his name!" They had some inkling, some awareness. Now they have a name and a story of what God has done that fulfills their inkling.

We could spend a lot of time talking about the relationships between different religions. But we can't give up the uniqueness of Jesus. For me, the bottom line is that somehow, everyone who comes to God comes through the Word of God, the true light who gives light to everyone in the world, the giver of life who is incarnate in Jesus.

What will we do when we realize that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life? This statement of Jesus is a call to come to him, to follow him, to walk with him, to be in relationship with him.

In Jesus, God comes to us to be with us. He walks with us as our companion. God wants to be with us. He goes before us as our leader. But, even more, he humbles himself and becomes the road we walk on. He is the road under our feet. Jesus wants us to hear and understand his word right where we are, in our real lives.

Wherever you are, He is there. If you are on a mountain, He is there. If you are in the valley, He is there. If you are in the pit, He is there...the road under your feet!

Can we ever believe that we do not have to come to where He is?
He is the road under our feet!

Can we ever trust that we do not have to reach up to grasp Him?
He is the road under our feet!

Don't believe God is too far away to be found, that life is too messed up to be straightened out, that failure patterns are too deeply set to be broken, entanglements too complex to be solved, the goal so distant that there's no use to try.

Jesus is where you are right now. (Reuben Welch, We Really Do Need to Listen 40-41)

Back in the fifth century, St. Augustine was a Christian preacher and bishop. In one of his sermons he said this about Jesus as the way: "He then became the Way whereby you should come; I do not say to you, seek the Way. The Way Itself has come to you, arise and walk. Walk, with the life, not with the feet (*Sermon 91 on the New Testament*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/160391.htm>). We walk the way of Jesus with our lives.

There's an old story about a pilot who crash landed in the jungles of Burma (that's how old this story is, it's not Burma now, it's Myanmar). The pilot wasn't seriously injured, and when a native came to help him get through the jungle, he was able to follow. But it was difficult trudging. The new friend had to hack and chop the dense jungle growth with his knife so that they could walk. Not feeling altogether safe, the pilot asked, "Are you sure this is the way?" His rescuer replied: "There is no way. I am the way. Follow me!" (Wallace Chappell, *When Jesus Rose* 97).

Jesus is the way, *the truth*, and the life. Truth is a major theme in this Gospel. John presents Jesus as the embodiment of God's wisdom. In the Old Testament wisdom writings, God's ways were truth and life (for example, Proverbs 2:19; 3:2, 16, 18; 4:10, 13, 22) (Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* 943).

Truth has to do with moral integrity, living the way of holiness. Jesus says, "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God" (John 3:21).

Truth relates to worship. Jesus says that true worshipers worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth (4:23-24).

He declares when we know the truth, the truth sets us free. Then he goes on, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (8:32, 36).

This truth is more than information. It's relationship. It's reality. We know the truth when we know Jesus. When we know him, he sets us free from sin, from fear, from everything that binds us and ties us up. He even

sets us free from death. One writer describes what Jesus Christ, the truth, sets us free from:

...guilt, condemning consciences, haunting memories, the insecurity of inadequacy, the frustration of self-negation, the dread of the future, worry over death. ...We are assured of abundant life now and eternal life forever. There is nothing which can happen to or around us that Christ cannot handle. He towers over history. He is the ultimate point of reference about reality. (Lloyd John Ogilvie, *The Bush Is Still Burning* 172-73)

Jesus as the truth helps us get our bearings. We can order our lives in line with reality. I remember reading after the 9/11 attacks about a New York City cab driver who said he kept getting turned around and lost. He had always used the Twin Towers as a point of reference and without them, he couldn't find his way. Jesus is the truth, the point of reference that enables us to find the right way.

We're not saying that there's no truth outside the Bible and Christian faith. But all truth is God's. A statement of faith from the early twentieth century says that God is the source of "all goodness and beauty, all truth and love" ("A Statement of Faith of the Korean Methodist Church," *The United Methodist Hymnal* #884). God is the source of all truth. Any seeking for truth will eventually lead us to Jesus. And in him we will find the truth about God, about ourselves, about life.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the *life*.

Two women were looking at an ad from a travel agency. It said, "Escape the ordinary, the usual, the predictable, the boring. Take a fun-filled trip with us." One of them said, "Doesn't that sound exciting?" The other replied, "Sure, if I didn't have to take the ordinary, the usual, the predictable, the boring with me." "Who's that?" "It's me!" (Ogilvie 176).

Jesus as the life gives us life beyond ordinary, predictable, and boring. Jesus is the way to true life that's an adventure. We experience the thrill of being part of God's great story, God's big plan, God's purpose for all creation.

Life is another major theme in John's Gospel. "In him was life, and that life was the light of all people" (1:4). The Lord is the living God. "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (5:26). Jesus is the one who gives life now and forever. When he promises to give "living water," he's saying that he's the source of life. Some of the other "I am" sayings affirm this: "I am the Bread of Life," "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Jesus says that he came so we may have abundant life, life to the full (10:10).

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (3:16). Jesus is the life. To know him is to know life. To have him through faith is to have life. This is not just endless life, but God's kind of life, now and forever.

Jesus gives us life that liberates us from the same old thing, the predictable, the boring. Sometimes we get in a rut. We don't seem to be getting anywhere. We're stuck. Jesus want to get us unstuck. He wants to give us life and have us get on with living.

This week, "The Wall that Heals" was in Durant. It's a replica of the Viet Nam Memorial. The wall that has all those names of people who died or went missing in the war. As Nancy and I looked at the wall, I thought of a story I heard about a Viet Nam veteran who went to the original memorial in Washington, D.C. He was eaten up with guilt because so many of his friends had died and he hadn't. And then he went to that dark memorial Wall where the names of those who died are inscribed. He found the names of his friends and traced them onto a piece of paper. But there was one name he couldn't find. He went to the officer at the directory and asked about this name. The officer said that name wasn't listed. "Did you know this man? Are you sure that's the right name?"

"Yes, I'm sure. It's my name."

The officer said, "Sir, your name's not there. You're not dead! You're alive! Go on home and get on with your life" (Jim Buskirk, "Why Is the Church Holy?" tape, First UMC, Tulsa).

Churches can get stuck too. I've talked before about *The Unstuck Church*. There's a consulting team called The Unstuck Group that works with churches to help them identify ways they're stuck and to find renewed

vision for ministry and mission in their community. We're going to work with the Unstuck Group later this summer to renew our sense of vision and mission.

God has more for us than just going through the motions, just beating our head against the same wall. Jesus is the life and he calls us to live, to be filled with his life and to go with him into the new life he has for us.

In the fifteenth century, Thomas à Kempis wrote a devotional book called *The Imitation of Christ*. In one place he portrays Jesus saying this:

Follow Me! I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Without the Way, there is no going; without the Truth, there is no knowing; without Life, there is no living. I am the Way you are to follow; I am the Truth you are to believe, I am the Life you are to hope for. (Book 3, chapter 56.1)