6/30-7/1-18 Rev. Amy Haines

John 14:1-7 One Way Road Signs Series

Before Google maps and GPS, I would navigate using good old-fashioned paper maps. While in Payne I even had a laminated map of Ft Wayne, Indiana, our closest largest town. I used that map to figure out how to get to the hospitals, especially Lutheran Hospital that was on the far side of town.

What would aggravate me about paper maps, however, is they would not always show intersections or one way roads. I would expect to turn onto a certain state route from the interstate only to realize the state route was an overpass only.

Downtown city streets are notorious for being one way roads, yet often those one way roads weren’t well marked on the maps. Even downtown Ft Wayne is full of one way roads. They are great to keep the traffic flowing, yet hard to drive if you are unfamiliar with them. I would drive around blocks trying to figure out how to get back to where I needed to be, when the road unexpectedly was a one-way road in the opposite direction.

This summer our sermon series playfully looks at the road signs we see on our road trips or daily commutes and how those road signs can be found in the stories of the Bible. Not literally, of course, directing the camels and chariots of old or us in our lives today. Figuratively, however, how often in life does it appear that we face “road signs” in ways that are far from street or highway?

What “signs” point us to rest, or to detour, or to be aware of danger ahead, or to travel in the right direction? Be they people or perceptions, the Spirit or situations, songs or Scripture, we need signs in life that show us the way, for our lives will never be a straight line, a smooth path, a clear road.

There will be times in life when the road curves, the fog descends, or we are faced with roadblocks. Those are times we have to travel carefully or even find a new road home. Those are times we desire guidance from someone who has traveled the road ahead of us. Those are times we give thanks that Jesus promises he is God-with-us in the craziness of this world.

So today we look at the road sign “One Way” and reflect on Jesus’ words in John 14, Jesus’ final I AM statement where he declares, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” That statement is powerful in and of itself. Yet I find it speaks even more to me when I set it in context, when I realize when and why Jesus shared those words.

The 14th chapter of John is part of Jesus’ farewell discourse, final words spoken to his disciples as they are gathered in an upper room to celebrate Passover the night before Jesus was crucified.

..Jesus has washed his disciples’ feet and has explained to them what this means (13:1-20). He has foretold his betrayal by Judas, and Judas has slipped out into the night (13:21-30). He has told his disciples that he will be with them only a little while longer, and that where he is going, they cannot come (13:33). He has also foretold Peter’s imminent denial (13:36-38).

No wonder the disciples are troubled. Their beloved teacher is leaving them, one of their own has turned against them, and the stalwart leader among the disciples is said to be on the cusp of a great failure of loyalty. It is as though the ground is shifting beneath their feet.

-Elisabeth Johnson 5-14-17 workingpreacher.org

They are confused, uncertain, and anxious, as if the road they were following suddenly took a hard right turn into an unknown landscape and they are hesitant about continuing on. They were still expecting a road to glory. They weren’t expecting the road to glory to first go through a rugged cross.

So today’s passage begins with words of comfort from Jesus. In fact, this entire passage is words of comfort and direction for troubled, uncertain disciples, then and now.

“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.” (v1 CEB)

Pastor Scott Hoezee comments that often we imagine this passage spoken with confidence and bravado, like a coach’s pep talk before the big game. Yet in looking once again at when Jesus spoke these words, following Judas’ departure and the prediction of Peter’s betrayal, following Jesus’ declaration that the road is about to lead straight to the cross, Pastor Scott imagines Jesus speaking these words with a quivering chin and tears in the corners of his eyes,

more like a mother pleading with her son to think about the choice he is about to make that will change his life forever.

--taken from Scott Hoezee cep.calvinseminary.edu 5-8-17

Trouble surrounds these disciples on that night. And trouble will follow them to the garden, to the cross, to the tomb. Remember on Easter morning Jesus appeared to them as they cowered in fear behind locked doors.

So Jesus strongly and lovingly says to his disciples,

“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.” (v1 CEB)

Here Jesus is asking for more than simple agreement, more than belief in a certain way of being. Rather, Jesus is offering an invitation to a deeper relationship based on trust, a trust that has already begun. So we could translate this verse to read “Don’t be troubled. Keep on trusting in God and trusting in me,” or “As you trust me, trust God.”

Jesus says to his disciples,

“Replace worry with trust. Replace fear with belief. You know who I am, and you know God’s ways. They are greater than anything you can imagine. So don’t be troubled. Stay strong, and trust my way for the road ahead.”

Have you ever felt like you don’t know which way to go when the road of life suddenly takes an unexpected turn? Jesus also says to us today,

“Trust me. Don’t let the troubles of this world overwhelm you. Follow me.”

If the disciples can trust Jesus and follow him to the garden, to the cross, to the tomb, and then into a future that declares his resurrection and hope for tomorrow, can we not also trust and follow Jesus no matter our struggles, our worries, our sorrows, our hopes?

Jesus’ words today are words of reassurance, words of comfort, words of hope to the disciples who just had their world turned upside down as well as for us here today who seek to navigate faith in this world.

John 14 is one of my favorite passages to share at a funeral. Many of you have now heard me do so. What a comforting thought to trust Jesus.

What a comforting image to picture, of Jesus preparing a dwelling place for each one of us, and each of our loved ones, in God’s heavenly, eternal kingdom. Jesus comforts with these words,

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” (v2-3 NRSV)

This is not simply showing up at a hotel that has every room waiting for the next guest. This is more like a grandmother eagerly waiting on children and grandchildren to arrive after a long trip, having prepared the house and the beds for a loving reunion. This is the welcome of a close relationship that calls and draws us one to another.

Pastor Gayle Landis once shared:

..When our children were very young, my husband and I moved away from our extended families for the first time. We were suddenly far enough away not to see them every week, and also far enough that a visit required an overnight stay.

Visits with three young ones were infrequent and happily anticipated. I worried, though, about bringing three kids into my mother-in-law's house for a few days, instead of a few hours. It was a lot to ask. Usually we left home after work on Friday and arrived very late, long after Grandma and Grandpa's normal bedtime.

I was troubled for nothing. On that first visit and every one that followed our place was prepared. One of my favorite memories of those days was coming into the house as Dave's mom was spreading the blankets out on guest beds and the couch. The time of night did not seem to matter, nor the fact that we were far from home. It was about her love for us, not about distance or trouble.

Gayle goes on to say:

.. The way home is not about going to a place, it is about the relationships that make the place home. Jesus is going to prepare their place, wherever that may be and whenever they will need it, because he already loves them. All through the Book of John, the writer is trying to share the importance of knowing Jesus. He stresses the kinds of signs that point to who Jesus is and not to the miracle itself.

Jesus' long speeches and "I am" statements point to the ways the disciples can relate to Jesus. He speaks of the connections they share and the difference this will make in their lives.

-Gayle Landis “A Place Prepared” 5-18-14 patheos.com

Pastor Douglas Davidson reminds us:

“Home is not about real estate. Home is about relationship.” --uncertain

When I used to return “home” to Franklin, I returned not so much for the buildings, for those change over time. I returned home for the relationships I still have with people, and the memories of love and welcome and growth in the midst of those relationships.

Jesus reassures us that there is a place for each of us in his Father’s house, if we are willing to be in relationship with him, if we will follow him and trust him. And at the Father’s house is a feeling of welcome, the pure joy of a family reunion. The Greek word for “house,” *oikia*, can also mean “household” or “family.” So Jesus invites us into his Father’s house not simply as a place, but invites us into the family of God as relationship, to abide with God and God with us in this life as well as the life to come.

Again, these are all words of comfort, words of reassurance, words that remind the disciples long ago and us here today who and whose we are—we are beloved children of God called to follow Jesus and claim our place in God’s family for now and all eternity.

Jesus declared: “You know the way to the place where I am going.”

“You already know the road I’m taking.” (v4 NRSV, MSG)

Yet Thomas, quiet, practical Thomas, cried out what so many still cry out today, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” “Master, we have no idea where you’re going. How do you expect us to know the road?” (v5 NRSV, MSG)

Like Thomas, we are practical people. We want the roadmap before we set out on the journey. We want to know where we are going, how long it will take to get there, and what detours or road construction we may face along the way. We will keep going down that one-way road if we know the destination is worth the journey. If not, then we are tempted to turn back, tempted not to take even the first step, tempted to find another way.

Yet that is not the path of faith.

Think about your own faith journey, however short or long it has been up to this day. If I were to ask you to take a piece of paper and map out your journey, would it look more like a highway or a back road? Would it be a straight line of growth and following Jesus, or be filled with switchbacks and u-turns and roundabouts where you keep on circling, not sure where to get off or move forward? Would your faith journey map out more like the stock markets up and down or a stock projection of growth? If your faith map is anything like mine, it would not be a straight line, but a map that includes detours and u-turns and circling the same block several times.

Life and faith are full of the unexpected—sometimes good surprises, sometimes unexpected setbacks, sometimes bursts of understanding, and sometimes two steps forward and three steps back.

Jesus cannot promise us to have our entire lives mapped out, for detours happen through circumstances out of our control, the consequences of the actions of others, or our own choices that take us down an unexpected road.

Yet throughout our journey, and no matter where we start our journey, Jesus calls us to the same destination—the presence of God. And Jesus calls us to follow him, for he will show us the way.

.. Understandably, the disciples are uncertain about how to get where Jesus is going. Jesus assures them that he himself is the way, *hodos.* In Greek, as in English, the word can mean path or road or can be used to mean way of life or practice. ..Life with Jesus is not a destination or an accomplishment—or a victory won—as much as it is a way of being and becoming.

-Gayle Landis “A Place Prepared” 5-18-14 patheos.com

Jesus said, “You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas asks, “How can we know the way?”

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

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus has been offering the disciples glimpses into who he was and what he came to do. Scholars have called these the I AM statements.

Jesus proclaimed,

I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the gate; I am the good shepherd; I am the resurrection and the life; I am the way, the truth, and the life; and I am the vine.

All of these I AM statements reflect who Jesus is, and all are a promise and invitation to new life for us. Today’s I AM statement is no different.

To Thomas and to us today who seek a roadmap on this journey of faith and life, Jesus declares “I am the way. Follow me.” To those who doubt Jesus, especially when he scandalously welcomed sinners and ate with tax collectors, offered healing and wholeness to the rejected and lonely, and emphasized relationship over rules, Jesus declares, “I am the truth. I reflect God’s kingdom ways.” And to those struggling for meaning and purpose in life, to those simply going through the motions, to those without hope, Jesus declares, “I am the life. Learn from me.”

In the story Alice in Wonderland, Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?" The cat replied, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” To which Alice responded, "I don't much care where.” "Then,” said the cat, “it doesn't matter which way you go.”

--sermonillustrations.com/purpose

We are not called to wander through life, not caring where we go or when, meandering on a whim. Rather, Jesus calls us to follow him, to trust him, to find life in him. Then, when we find life in Jesus, we will find purpose for our daily journeys. That purpose will guide us in mission and ministry, in love and service, at home and work and in the community.

As Pastor Hank Blunk reveals,

“Jesus is the way to God, what God intends us to be. He is the truth of God, how God is. He is the life God wants for each of us: a life of close relationships, healthy and life-giving intimacy, good will, and good deeds.”

–Upper Room Disciplines 2005 p. 124

We may try other paths; we may seek other roads; yet Jesus is the one and only way we find our way to God.

Jesus said to him,

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” (v 6-7 NRSV)

Here Jesus is once again reassuring the disciples. For the Greek is not simply

“if you know me” but “If you know me, *and you do*, then you know my Father.” This is once again a reminder to anchor the disciples on the journey of faith. That as they know Jesus, they know the Father. As they have seen Jesus, they have seen God. As they have experienced Jesus’ ways, they have experienced God’s ways.

In that moment of grief and crisis, they may cry out that they don’t know the way.

In our moments of unexpected tragedy or life-altering news, we may cry out that we don’t know the way.

In those moments, let us listen once again for Jesus’ words of comfort:

“Don’t be troubled. Trust. Believe. Follow me. I am the way, the truth and the life. Through me you will know God. Through me you already do. Keep on keeping on, following my ways for this life until eternal life.”

Jesus is not making any exclusionary declaration here. He is not answering our question about other religions. Rather, Jesus is reassuring those who already follow him to keep on following him, for their room is already prepared. Even without Jesus in the flesh, he is reassuring his disciples and followers that they already know the way ahead. It is the way of God’s kingdom love, the way of forgiving love. It is the way of the cross, the way of self-sacrifice. It is the way of the empty tomb, the way of transforming freedom.

Are we willing to believe in such a way, and trust such a way, and follow such a way? Are we willing to believe, trust and follow Jesus?

There is no need to search for a hidden treasure map, or a secret route off the island. Jesus is our way, our truth, our life. He will guide us, he will teach us,

and he will empower us, to navigate this journey we call faith in life, to move forward in mission and ministry in this life with a promise of a dwelling place in life eternal. May we follow the roads signs that direct us to live the way of Jesus.

Let us pray.