

Lenten Midweek 4, 2011

Text: John 14:1-6

Title: "The Way"

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Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus...

Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,
Jesus, the Son of God,
Jesus, the bread of life,
Jesus, the Savior,
Jesus, the door,
Jesus, who gives living water,
Jesus, the Good Shepherd,
Jesus, the light of the world,
And Jesus, the way.

Last week we had our favorite picture of Jesus, Jesus the Good Shepherd, who cares for His sheep, leading them to green pastures and still waters, and laying down His life for the sheep.

This week we have our least favorite picture of Jesus. Jesus, the way. But not just any way. Jesus, the only way. "No one comes to the Father except through me," says Jesus.

There's only one way to the Father. There's only one way to heaven, and it's through Jesus Christ. All other ways, all other roads lead to destruction.

We don't like to hear this. We don't like this sort of exclusivism. We don't like this kind of judgmentalism. Can't there be another way? What about all those well-meaning folks out there who have chosen another way- Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Spiritualism, Humanism, Animism, to name just a few?

What about them? Don't all paths lead to God?

Recently, a well-known Evangelical preacher named Rob Bell has been in the news. You may have seen him on the morning talk shows. He's got a new book out called, "Love Wins." Basically, Rob Bell can't believe in a God who would punish people, so he believes that, in the end, everyone will go to heaven, because God is love, and he would never condemn anyone eternally.

That's the kind of God who most Americans probably believe in. The God who's a bit of a softy, a pushover, who eventually just lets everyone it, no matter what road they take.

The answer Jesus gives is "no." Apart from Jesus there is no salvation. "No one" means "no one." All paths do not lead to God.

Jesus doesn't say, "Well, you can follow me if you want, but if you find another way that suits you better, that's fine, too." Jesus is the way.

It's important to take Jesus at His word.

Jesus doesn't say, "I know the way." Or "I can show you the way," or "I'll lead the way." No. Jesus says, "I am the way."

The only way to the Father is through Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus Christ Himself is the road that we travel as we make our way home to the Father. His body is the highway of our salvation.

In Eden we lost our way. We followed Satan's directions and left the path. Satan's road led out from paradise into the wilderness. It was a road filled with toil, suffering, and pain. It was a road that led through thorns and briars. It was a road that led to death.

Many more generations traveled that same road, Satan's road. It always looks inviting at the start, but in the end it leads to destruction.

The folks at Babel tried to use this road to make their way to heaven, but in the end, they were scattered over the face of the earth.

The children of Israel were too scared of the Lord's road to the Promised Land paved by the ten commandments, and so they took the long way around and perished in the desert.

The nation of Israel traveled Satan's road, and it led all the way to Babylon, to exile, and to death.

All of man's attempts to find the way and return to Paradise failed. All the roads were dead ends. Literally.

So Jesus came to provide a new way, a better way than Satan's road. A road that leads back to Paradise. Jesus' way is narrow and difficult. It also to death and the cross. But it also leads through the cross to the empty grave and heaven itself.

Jesus walked the road to Calvary, the hard road through the streets of Jerusalem, leaving a trail of blood behind Him. Jesus walked this road so that you wouldn't have to.

Jesus Christ is the way. He is the only one to pass through death to life. The only way to go with Him along this path is to be a part of Him, to be joined to Him, to be one with Him. We can't just follow behind him, using him as our example. No, we are one with Him, and He takes us with Him.

This happens in Holy Baptism. St. Paul writes, "³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

In Holy Baptism you are joined to the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You can say with St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Jesus Christ lives in me."

Baptism joins you to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You are with Him every step of the way. Every step from Jerusalem to Calvary and back to God's right hand- you were there. In Baptism Jesus' Name was put on you, and you became one with Him.

You also become one with Him through His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Listen to Hebrews 10:19-22, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Jesus Christ is the new and living way- we enter through His flesh and blood- the Lord's Supper, having been washed with pure water- Holy Baptism.

In Holy Baptism and in the Lord's Supper we are united with Jesus Christ- His life, death and resurrection. He is now the way for us to enter the holy place, the presence of our holy God.

The way back to Paradise is through Jesus Christ- through His pain, through His suffering, through His triumph and through His victory.

Holy Week begins in 11 days. Starting on Palm Sunday we will watch Jesus on the move. Into Jerusalem and to the temple, up to the upper room for the Last Supper, out to Gethsemane to pray, back to the city and the house of the high priest, to Pilate and Herod and back to Pilate, through the streets of Jerusalem, out of the city to Calvary, to the tomb for three days' rest, down to hell itself, and then back to Mary and the disciples.

It's a long journey, and as you listen to the story once more, think to yourself, "I was there. I am joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." We are not just telling a story that happened a long time ago, it is your story, your journey, you were there.

Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the way.