

## “How to Know the Way”

Rev. Jennifer S. Dunfee

May 10, 2020

There is much to discover of entertaining and uplifting things happening online that weren't before the novel coronavirus. Patrick Stewart is still reading a Shakespeare sonnet a day and is on number 51, NBA players playing the basketball video game 2K – against each other in a bracket, John Kracinski DJing a virtual prom on his Youtube show called Some Good News that this past week had Oprah, Malala, Samuel Jackson and Stephen Spielberg on it among others, Andrea Bocelli singing in front of an empty Duomo in Milan. I imagine you have some of your favorite for culture, connection, a laugh or a cry. One of mine has been following the professor and writer Kate Bowler on twitter. Kate is a Duke Divinity school professor who studied mega churches and the prosperity gospel right before being diagnosed with Stage IV Colon Cancer at age 35. After which she wrote a book, *Everything Happens for a Reason and Others Lies I've loved*. She now does a weekly podcast, which is great, but I want to share her nightly tweets that she began on April 1<sup>st</sup> and which are fitting for a sermon on Mother's Day.

She tweeted: “Every night, in the sweetest voice, my six year old asks me a question in order to try and stall me from leaving. I commit to documenting these questions every night for the next 30 days because “That Kid Has Game.” Then she posts his questions each night, like “do you know anyone with one eye? Is Google a person? Was God ever born? How do pirates feel when they walk on land? Does God sleep? And Mom can you please turn off the storm?” Likely, we all know some version of this kid and we all know what it felt like when we were kids and we didn't want to be left. And so we would find ways to stall and keep a person who brought us comfort there just a little bit longer. Trying not to seem as desperate as we felt, maybe by asking questions. Questions are always a good way to get a little more of someone's time and attention.

Which brings us to today's gospel reading. At Bible Study this week we remembered that the good news of scripture is to be found from both ends of the periscope. On the one end, are words we memorize, promises of way, truth and life, comfort of the dwelling places of the Lord prepared for us. On the other end is the context in which Jesus spoke them, how they fit into this Gospel and the gospel that is the good news of Jesus Christ. Here is the context: Jesus is heading out the door. And the disciples want him to stay. Right before Chapter 14, Jesus says, “little children, I am with you only a little longer.” And the disciples don't like it, and they are scared, and not sure how to get through that night, this conversation takes place the night of the Last Supper or any night, without him beside them.

The disciples do not feel ready for Jesus to leave and have more questions, but really, the thing they would like the most, is not to have their questions answered but to just keep him, like the child as the parent heads toward the door. Three disciples speak to Jesus –

two in these verses and one right before it and what Jesus says here he says in response. In John 13: 36 Peter asks, “Lord, where are you going?” Here Thomas says “Lord we do not know where you are going, how will we know the way?” and then a few verses later, Philip says “Lord, show us the father and we will be satisfied.”

To Peter, who wants to know where he is going, Jesus shares words of comfort to his and his friends’ troubled hearts, a promise of an abundant dwelling place, a room prepared just for them, and that Jesus is indeed going to come back to them. To Thomas, who is worried about finding the way to Jesus, Jesus says that the way is not a certain road to walk down but a life lived with Jesus: Jesus words tell Thomas not to worry that you have been on the wrong way, or directed your purpose around something false, or that abundant life was an empty promise. Jesus tells him this is so because God can be trusted, because of what Thomas has seen in Jesus. To Phillip, whose heart is still not satisfied, Jesus assures him that God dwells in Jesus, and to know Jesus is to know God, and to see Jesus’ works is to see the works of God. When Jesus says to Phillip, “don’t you know me” it is a call to remember what he knows and has seen. It is easy to forget what we know when we are afraid.

And then Jesus call Phillip and the disciples to continue the call, to do the works as a team of followers, with Christ’s strength inside them. Jesus words of comfort contain a call to the community to live in the way of Christ. Sometimes the best thing we can do, when we are worried, and we are questioning, and have trouble trusting, is to simply do the works. What better way to know we are on the way. Jesus answers not by closing things shut but by opening worlds.

I am reminded of the poem by Meister Eckhart, the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century German mystic and theologian called You are Not an Answer.

“There is no Why in You/  
and so I must learn to trust /  
that You are not an answer/  
to my questions but rather/  
the source that is true before /  
every question I ever had /  
and the love beyond every /  
answer I will ever know.

Jesus words speak to the troubled hearts of his beloved friends who worry they won’t be able to find the way in a fearful time. We ask similar questions now, as Jesus beloved children with troubled hearts in a fearful time who call out, “Lord, where are you to be found”, and “how are we to find our way”? There is a lot we don’t know, a lot of fear, so much we wish wasn’t happening, so much uncertainty and worry for the future. So Jesus listens patiently to us, and reminds us that all that death will not separate us, that when things feels most troubled, trust that we know the way because it is as simple as sharing our lives with Christ. He is certainty in

uncertainty but not because we always see where he is going clearly and can predict his way, but because he is discoverable in all of our journeys.

Jesus is not just a bus stop for shelter along the way, or a signpost for the upcoming fork in the road, or a buffer for the next curve, he is the way and that means he is worthy of our life's journey, because he is not a fixed point but a moving and living Jesus. Each time the disciples ask Jesus for directions and assurance, he points them back to where they are and what they know. So we do what the disciples do here – we ask our questions, even if we've asked them before, even if we should already know. We let Jesus call to mind what we know of him, "Don't you know me, Jen, after all this time?" Then we do the work. Jesus speaks comfort directly to the specifics of our worry and yet points us through and beyond those details to a calling – that even in uncertainty, there is a way of Jesus to follow – the works of love, healing, and forgiveness. A way that they have seen him embody all along and that they know because they know him, we know him, Thanks be to God.