

Kate Heinzl, pastor UMC

John 14: 1-14

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 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. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' 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.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'

SERMON:

Peter Marty, editor of Christian Century magazine, wrote an article several years ago entitled 'Tourist and traveler'¹.

In it he explains that early Christians used the Greek word *hodos* (*hoe - dos*'), or "the way," to describe the literal and figurative paths their lives followed.² In our scriptures, we have the epiphany story, where the wise men returned to their home country "by another road (*hodos*)." We have those who traveled the road to Emmaus, speaking of what happened to them "along the way" the *hodos*.

In our scripture this morning, in response to Thomas blurting out - 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said "I am the way." ,

'I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

The Way - Hodos, can also refer to a way of life. Metaphorically it's used to describe a way of acting, thinking or feeling. By the end of the book of Acts, we find Christians referring to their whole communal life in Christ as "the Way."

The Way, Jesus' way, is a way, a life, that encompasses suffering and abundance. Jesus' way invites a choosing, again and again, to consider how we want to live in this world. Do we seek reconciliation? Do we offer grace? What is the Way we trod?

This expression, Jesus as *hodos* - a way full of twists and turns and unforeseen encounters, a way that is confusing and bewildering, contrasts sharply with the desire for some to read the scripture, looking for Jesus to be the answer. Jesus never said "I am the answer."

Sometimes we just want answers. Show us, tell us what it means to be church together, to live in community. Give us the answer Jesus.

The difference between the two descriptions of Jesus - being the Way and being the answer - is huge. Jesus as the Way invites openness to all of the ambiguities and doubts that go with a journey along uncertain paths. Jesus as the answer suggests a kind of paint-by-number way of moving through the world—a relationship involving little risk.

¹ [Tourists and travelers along the way](#)

²

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/hodos.html#:~:text=a%20travellers%20way%2C%20journey%2C%20travelling>

What's been your experience? Were you taught that Jesus, and scripture, has all the answers?

'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' says Thomas - Jesus' response, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life.'

Historically, there's a difference between a traveler and a tourist. In previous centuries, travelers were those interested in learning from unfamiliar settings, embarking on a journey that enlarged perspective. In contrast, tourists are passive; expecting interesting things to happen to them. The tourist goes sightseeing.

Travel comes from the same word as *travail*, meaning trouble, work, or even torment. A traveler takes risks, plunges into diverse cultures. Unplanned experiences and challenges are the traveler's norm. Travelers eat whatever food is placed before them. They aim to learn as much as possible from this new landscape.

A tourist sacrifices less. The word *tour*, from the Latin *tornus*—a tool for making circles—literally means “one who goes in circles.” Insulated from the noise, the smells, and the local people, a tourist's circle is complete once back home unpacking mementos and sharing photos.

Travelers and tourists - I've been both.

On Easter Sunday I told about arriving at the Florence train station in Italy and being found by Gianni, the tour guide who led me in delightful circles through Tuscany - Gianni took care of all our needs, leaving few decisions up to our group. What a pleasure! A week of being a tourist.

The week before was much more the experience of a traveler - my brother Paul and I were following The Way of Saint Francis - following a section of Francis' well worn path between Assisi and Rome. Well worn long ago. Today the path was challenging to find at times.

One day our destination was 'the faggio' (fah-joe), the beech tree, claimed to be the same tree that Francis took shelter under in the midst of a storm, some 800 years ago. We were pilgrims following the Way of one who called people to a new way of life - one rooted in poverty that led to a spirit of abundant living.

The trail to the faggio was up, up, up and in hindsight, we should have turned around as soon as the trail markers we were following turned from blue and yellow to red and white. But we didn't want to lose the elevation we'd gained! And so a few hours later, when we lost the trail completely, now accompanied by Clare, a French woman who had also lost her way - we found ourselves in a high alpine meadow surrounded by cows. Cows with kind of scary looking horns, and with bells that made a delightful sound. With no cell service to pull up a more complete map, we had only our guide book to show the way. We were utterly lost.

By some serendipitous, or miraculous turn of events, we found two angels in the guise of Italian farmers, who ended up driving us the nearly 5 miles to the trail we intended to travel.

It was a day of looking and finding, of travail, and sacred connections. The Way was indeed full of unexpected invitations.

In that Christian Century magazine article, Marty wonders if congregations are full of spiritual travelers and tourists. Travelers would be those who come to immerse their lives and refocus their values. Wanting to breathe the language of faith and know the way of Christ, even if travail may be part of the bargain. The spiritual tourists show up for a more passive experience, happy to drop in when they are in the mood. They spectate and consume.

Spiritual travelers and tourists.

We all choose the spiritual road or path we follow.

Will ours be a journey rich in mystery, full of unknowables, and at times hardships?

Or will it be a safer path where we pick up a word here and a phrase there, making a few social connections along the way?

Oh the ways we travel! And how the people and experiences enrich, challenge and invite us to live deeper into our faith.

Jesus tells us he is the Way.

Not the answer - no, he gives few answers.

Instead, he shows the way for us to be travelers alongside him. A road that is not always clearly marked, where we may get lost -

may find unexpected friendship,

may be asked even to step into places that challenge and even down right scare us.

Spiritual traveler or tourist? What's the road you trod?

SILENCE

Moving into communion:

Last Sunday Ben took us on a musical journey, an adventure in sound, changing the way we listen to music through the realization of connection and how various musicians and pieces are linked and built on one another.

We heard from the early jazz musician Robert Johnson all the way to Joni Mitchell. What a meandering pilgrimage, of one influencing another.

In preparing for our service this week, Hal suggested we sing a song new to most of us, in *Voices Together* - #474, "All who hunger, gather gladly". In searching for a recording, I learned some of the history of this song.

It's another story of one artist building off the work of another - or, as Hal put it: it's 'an example of how inspiration flows through the sacred arts.'

The text of this hymn was written by Canadian clergywoman Sylvia Dunstan (1955-1993), who became one of the leading hymn writers in North America during her brief life. 6 of her hymn texts appear in our new hymnal, *Voices Together*.

Her early songs used the folk guitar. Later, realizing that she was not a gifted musician, she focused on writing only the texts for hymns.

The lyrics of this hymn came to her as she wandered up and down a beach, setting it to the tune to our first hymn this morning 'Brethren we have met to worship'. Originally, these words were sung to that tune. A few years later, right around the time of her death, another musician stumbled upon that hymn, found the words inspiring, and wrote new music to go with her lyrics. The ones we have here today.

What a journey - from 'Brethren we have met to worship' which came to together in the early 1800's, and then 170 years later a new set of words followed by new music. How might that music continue to travel and find new life?

Hear the words of this hymn:

"All who hunger, gather gladly; holy manna is our bread.

Come from wilderness and wandering.

Here, in truth, we will be fed.

*You that yearn for days of fullness, all around
us is our food.*

*Taste and see the grace eternal. Taste and see
that God is good."*

It's a song of communion. Of coming together in search of sustenance; it's a song of being hungry strangers and becoming a welcomed guest.

As we listen, and later sing, consider how you're called to travel - at times travail - as you follow the One who is the Way, the truth and the Life.

Confession:

Confession: VT #893 (Have the congregation turn toward one another, with one side saying 'God of grace' and the other side 'forgive us'.)

For failing to love others as you have loved us...

God of grace, forgive us.

For wasting your gifts and hoarding our goods...

God of grace, forgive us.

For plundering the earth and abusing the planet...

God of grace, forgive us.

For fearing those who are strange to us and ignoring those in need...

God of grace, forgive us.

For losing heart and abandoning hope...

God of grace, forgive us.

For all the ways we turn from you...

God of grace, forgive us.

(SILENCE)

We offer our prayers in the name
of the One who saves, Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

My friends, we are welcomed by the God of Grace - the one who invites us to follow Christ's Way - the way of love -

Welcomed to the table for sustenance, so that we can go out into the world living the Good News.

Communion

INSTRUCTIONS:

Gluten free bread

Come forward, take bread and cup,
step to the side to eat and drink, then leave the cup in the basket.

All who seek, all who hunger, all who are on the Way are welcome at the table.
Jesus told those gathered that he came not for the powerful, but for the weak, those in need of healing.

Jesus invites us all to this meal of liberation. The passover celebrated freedom from oppression.

As we live into the call to practice resurrection, we receive the bread and cup so that we will be changed, become something new. Enlivened to follow the One who is the Way.

INVITE SERVERS FORWARD

Break bread, pour cup...

The table is set, come, eat.

The blessing after the meal:

**May this meal nourish us and refresh us,
may it strengthen us and renew us, may it unite us and keep us in God's gracious love, now
and forever.**

Let us pray.

God of love, we give you thanks for satisfying our wandering hearts with this meal.

As we continue on the Way, your way -

**Inspire in us the resolve and the courage, the compassion and the passion,
to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. Amen**