



**5 EASTER**  
MAY 17/18, 2014

**FIRST LUTHERAN**  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

ACTS 7:55-60; PSALM 31:1-5, 15-16; I PETER 2:2-10; JOHN 14:1-14

*The Way Home*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

This gospel passage is a favorite for many families who find themselves forced to formulate a funeral plan. And no wonder: it's filled with both beautiful words and comforting images of assurance.

The story takes us back in time to the night before Good Friday. Jesus has revealed: that Peter will deny him, that Judas will betray him, and that all the disciples will be left by him. It's a *litany* of bad news for the disciples, and leaves them all **more** than a **little** anxious about what the future will bring. It's an **unpleasant** place that **we** all know **too**...

Yet in the midst of this *arena* of *anxiety*, Jesus also **assures** the disciples that they know the way to where he's going... The **trouble** is, the disciples are only sure that they **aren't** sure about the road ahead. In fact, Thomas protests, ***Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?***

*How can we know the way?* is a question that we humans worry about throughout our lives. From when we're little and afraid of getting lost, to trying to find our way in a big city or through a wide-open wilderness...all the way to: waiting for our children to walk home from school for the first time, or drive off in the car for the first time, or leave home for college, travel or work...

*How can we know the way?* – indeed!

If only we were as smart as the **animals** we claim to be superior to. Many of them have that uncanny ability to **always** find their way home...

Alaskan red salmon are hatched, swim downstream and out into the vast ocean, spending three years at sea. Then something triggers their ***home, sweet home*** alarm and they find their way back to very same river or stream, and swim up it, against the current to the very place they were spawned...and start the cycle all over again.

I also think of migratory birds – butterflies even – that fly for hundreds, some thousands of miles, between their winter and summer homes. But I guess that's not **quite** so unique – right? We have our **own** flock of *snowbirds* who do the same sort of thing...

But always knowing how to get home is not an innate human trait. We have to **work** with our children to **teach** them to figure out how to get home from wherever they are – the neighbor's, a park down the street, the school, college...the parameters are always expanding...

True, there comes a time when we don't want them to come back and set up a permanent residence in our home... But as a rule, we always want them to know where home is...and sometimes that's easier said than done.

In this day and age of smart phones with GPS programs, it's easy to find our way around just about anywhere. In the **old** days, we had to rely on personal experience and physical clues. Like: *turn at the big oak on the corner, or at the red barn on the Johnson farm, or in front of the green house on the hill* – which is OK as long as those landmarks stay upright and the same color.

When we were in St. Peter after the tornado: **trees** were uprooted, **barns** were blown down and **houses** were re-sided or re-painted. As a result, many senior citizens had a hard time navigating what had been painfully obvious paths from home to the grocery store or pharmacy and back. Too many changes left folks feeling dazed and confused...

Now, I want you to think about our gospel lesson for today and put yourselves in the disciples' place. Jesus tells you that he's going to leave you – this after he has uprooted you from your job and family, set you on a new course of service, performed amazing miracles, changed hearts, saved souls...and had threats against his life.

that you know the way the way to the place where he's going.

**What would you be feeling at this point?** Anxious. Worried. Unsure. Scared. Abandoned. Angry...

We can see this raw emotion in Thomas' **worried** question to Jesus, *Lord, how can we know the way?* – I'm pretty sure that you and I would have been feeling the same kind of concern...

The disciples are most likely thinking of Jesus moving to: another **location**, a different **country**, a **home** where he might be safe from the people who want him dead... They **certainly** didn't know that he was talking about our **spiritual** home, nor how they could know the way to get **there**.

So again, if we were **ducks, salmon** or **butterflies**, finding our home would not be a problem – it would be written on our hearts, in our bones, on our souls.

But such is not the case for us *smarter* humans – in **some** ways, **our** problem is that we're just too smart for our own good... We out-think ourselves, or get burdened by the worries of the world, or simply forget about what's truly needed to find our home in God. And, as it was in the case of the **disciples**, **so** it is with **us**: almost always the answer is much simpler than we can admit or imagine.

Jim Lovell was one of the Apollo 13 astronauts. Some of you remember that their spacecraft had an explosion on the way to the moon. So immediately their mission changed from visiting the moon to getting home alive from the moon.

In a pre-flight interview, Lovell had told of another close encounter he'd had with death – while a Navy pilot in the Viet Nam war. After one night mission he found himself in trouble: his radar had jammed, his homing signal was gone...in fact, it was leading him **away** from where he was supposed to go. They were also in combat conditions, which means that there were no lights on the aircraft carrier – he was supposed to use his instruments to find his way home.

Well, as it often happens, then things went from bad to worse. He flipped on his map light to see if he could figure out where he was, when suddenly **zap!** everything in the cockpit shorted out.

His instruments were gone. His lights were gone. The only thing he knew for sure was that he was running out of fuel... So he started to make plans to ditch the jet in the ocean and at least have a chance to survive. In the deep blackness of the night, he glanced down to see if he could spot a wave, anything to help him get his bearings...and his eyes were filled with an amazing sight...

There stretched across the ocean – a green trail was glowing in the darkness. It was the algae, that phosphorescent stuff that gets churned up in the wake of a big ship. Said Lovell, *It was like a long carpet that was just laid out right beneath me. And it was - leading me home.*

It was an amazing thing – yet stranger still was his realization that if his cockpit lights had not shorted out, he never would have seen that path leading him to safety. Lovell concluded his story by saying, *So you never know... what...events are going to transpire to get you home.*

In a similar sort of way, Jesus is saying the same thing to the disciples – and to you and me. As the stories of our lives unfold, we will see times: -when we're at home – and wish we weren't;  
-away from home and wish that we were back;  
-or lost and wondering if we'll ever find home again.

And if you're like me, in most of those times of struggle, we'll be focusing primarily on ourselves, rather than on God; on what's wrong rather than on who's right there beside us, on the worst that could happen, rather than on the best that God has to offer.

And offer, God does – always! Throughout the Bible, God gives us life and love, instructions and inspirations, joys and challenges, problems to solve and solutions to celebrate. And here Jesus shows us the way home. Says the Lord, *I am the way, the truth and the life.* And even more than that, he promises to come and take us to himself to be with him and God.

His directions are absolutely simple...and because of that, hard for us to believe. The great 20<sup>th</sup> Century theologian Karl Barth was once asked what great truth he had discovered about God over the years. His answer? *Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.*

When that light dawns, or, as in the case of Jim Lovell, when the light zaps out...that's often when the simple blessing of God comes through and calls us back home – spiritually and spatially – to delight in the Lord's loving presence. Those few, simple words are all we need for our directions home. So let's say those famous words together: *Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.*  
Amen!