

Sunday May 7th, 2023

Easter V

John 14:1-14

“Greater Things are Yet to Come”

In September 2002, the year before we moved to Toronto and to the Donway church, Laura and I, and our two kids, had the wonderful pleasure of traveling with our good friends the Eadys. Our destination was a time share resort in Kissimmee Florida, within a very short distance of Disneyland. I must say that that trip was perhaps one of my favourite vacations.

The facilities where we stayed were outstanding; the weather was great (not too hot or too cold). The resort, and the places we spent our time, were not overly crowded because most kids were back to school. But I must admit that the true highlight of our adventure was the Disney theme parks. We went to three of them, including one of the water parks. There was lots of laughter among us, and many a thrilling ride.

One of the rides that I found scary enough, but also fascinating, was at Disney’s Hollywood Studios Park. It was called, I think, the Rock and Roll coaster, and it was based on the idea that when you were on the ride, you were going with the rock band Aerosmith as they went on tour. Interestingly enough, the band announced this week they are going on their last concert tour. The ride was loud, and very fast, but great fun. I was drawn to the ride because I grew up in the era of Aerosmith’s popularity.

I am somewhat familiar with their music, but never actually bought any of their albums. That’s record albums for you youngsters out there who only know what downloads and iTunes are. The popularity of the band, and Steven Tyler their lead vocalist, seems unabated with time. Tyler is also, perhaps best known for his screaming vocals, his time on American Idol, and his off-stage antics in the seventies and eighties, with drugs and alcohol.

It just so happens, that I was reading a fascinating collection of anecdotes from all kinds of sources, when I ran across the history of one of Aerosmith’s most famous songs; “Walk This Way”. The true story of this song is that Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry, and bassist Tom Hamilton, were exhausted from rehearsing a new musical piece they were working on, and they decided to take a break and watch the movie, *Young Frankenstein*.

Hamilton reports his experience watching the movie, “There’s that part in the movie where Igor says ‘Walk this way,’ and the other guy walks the same way (as Igor does) with the hump and everything. We thought it was the funniest thing we’d ever seen.” After the movie, they told singer Steven Tyler that the name of the new song had to be “Walk This Way.”

Their story inspired Steven Tyler, who immediately rushed out and scribbled the lyrics to the song on the walls of the studio’s stairway, and the band recorded the song right then and there. (Monumental Bathroom Reader, pg. 337) I mention all this because of a question that the song’s title raises. Have you ever considered how important it is, knowing the way?

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How we travel to a destination is irrelevant, as long as we know what direction to go.

Like in the funny movie *Young Frankenstein*, we can limp along, with a hump on our backs, or we can dance along, light on our feet; it really doesn't matter as long as we know our destination. Knowing the way clears up a lot of confusion and struggle. It makes the journey more pleasurable. Essentially, that is what Jesus is saying in today's passage.

When he says to his disciples, "Don't be troubled", he is really saying "don't be confused or misled". The destination for Jesus' disciples, which includes you and me, is very clear. "There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you." The Father's house of many rooms is the destination of our life's journey. The Father's house is where the road for Jesus' followers ends.

Crawl, limp, dance, run: it doesn't matter, as long as you are heading the right way. Jesus is saying the same thing as Igor in the film *Young Frankenstein* and the band *Aerosmith*, "Walk this way!" Follow me! In other words, quoting Jesus, "You know where I am going and how to get there." Well, actually, maybe we don't.

The apostle Thomas replies to Jesus' words about knowing the direction, "No we don't know Lord. We haven't any idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" How many times in our lives have we expressed this same sentiment? "We have no idea where you are going Lord." We might express it in other ways like, "What are you doing in my life Lord or why is this happening to me" but the point is the same.

Eugene Petersen, noted author and theologian, wrote something that really spoke to me about this passage. In reflecting on Jesus' famous words, "I am the way the truth and the life", Petersen notes that we often breeze past the "way" and head straight for the "truth". Petersen writes, "The Jesus way is wedded to the Jesus truth that brings about the Jesus life. We cannot proclaim Jesus' truth then do it in any old way we like. Nor can we follow the Jesus way without speaking the Jesus truth." (Conversations, Pg. 1665)

I never caught this fact before, maybe because of how obvious it is, but notice that the "way" comes first in this list. The literal translation of the word "way" is actually the word "road" or "path". Jesus is saying, "I am the path". More accurately, he is saying, "I am the correct path". Jesus' point is that before you can have truth, you must be going in the right direction.

Implied, in this statement, is a life that is focused on its God given purpose; a purpose that is revealed over time, as we travel the road. However, we are an impatient lot are we not? We want to know every little detail and every obstacle before we set out. I don't know if you are aware of this or not, but the CAA or Canadian Automobile Association used to have for its members a special service. If you are taking a driving trip in North America, they can, with some notice, prepare what is called a "Trip Tic".

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It is a page- by-page- flip book map, indicating the route you should take, and indicating where any major construction is located, where you might be slowed in your progress.

Having used one to go on that previously mentioned Florida trip, I found it very useful and even fun turning the pages as we went along. O, how we wish, Jesus issued all of us our own personal Trip Tic. You know; something we could turn to every day and see the route marked out clearly and the troubles that lay ahead. It would be great to have such a thing, but it isn't going to happen. Jesus calls us instead, to simply walk his road and to trust him in the journey.

You cannot get to the Jesus truth, unless you are on the Jesus Road, and only on the Jesus Road will you find the Jesus life. There is an old proverb that states, "You cannot understand a person unless you walk a mile in their shoes." Well, you cannot understand Jesus unless you walk his way.

I am not sure how it happens, but I see the results far too often. Well meaning, sincere Christians, who: focus on, stress, and promote the truth of Jesus. They honestly believe that as long as everyone has the Jesus truth, everything will be right with the world. The problem is, however, that much of what we might claim to be Jesus' truth is negated by our lives that fail to walk the Jesus way.

To truly understand the Jesus truth, we must walk his way. We must experience the cost of discipleship. We must, with his help, overcome temptation. We must know the full depth and power of agape love and sacrifice. This is exactly what John Bunyan was trying to communicate to us with his monumental work "A Pilgrim's Progress". A pilgrim, who follows Christ, is always on the move; always growing and learning.

It is never enough to claim you know the truth of Christ; we must also walk his road. As you can now understand, it is very hard for people to accept the truth from those who do not walk the way. The truth of Jesus is easily dismissed by others, if our lives do not reflect his journey. If we want to see the Father, then we must walk with the Son. If we want to do great things, even things greater than Jesus, we must get on the road.

Only, when we fully accept the fact, that our journey with Jesus is not over until we get to the Father's house, will we fully experience life, and know the truth that shall truly set us free. Until we are in the Father's house, our work and journey is not finished.

I don't know how many of you have had the troubling experience of driving in the car with children, who irritate us by asking repeatedly, "Are we there yet?" Well, I am here to tell you that in your Christian walk, you are not there yet, nor will you ever be, until you take your room in the "Father's house." Now, I am sure that one of our chief concerns about embracing the way of Christ is that we know it will have challenges.

John Bunyan describes the challenges in our pilgrimage in very creative and descriptive words. Bunyan talks at length of the traps, and distractions that keep us from reaching our true destination. Yet, we don't need John Bunyan to tell us how life is.

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We know from experience that there are and will be times when we do not know what is around the next corner on our journey.

We also may feel like the passengers on an airliner coming across the Atlantic Ocean. The Pilot came on and stated, “Well, passengers, I have good news and bad news, which would you like first?” The passengers voted and the majority wanted the bad news first. “The bad news is we are lost.” As you can imagine, there was a significant hush that fell among the passengers. Finally, the Pilot said, “The Good News is we are ahead of schedule.”

The good news for the modern church is that it is very busy; busy promoting and defending the truth. The bad news is that quite often the church is lost. It has lost sight of its destination, and is reluctant to walk the road of Christ. In other words, we are lost and yet we are making good time. Frankly, we would rather proclaim the truth, than live the truth. “Talk is cheap”, we can truly say.

How often have we as individuals, or as a fellowship, stopped our striving and simply asked, “Which way did he (meaning Jesus) go?” The bad news maybe is that we have stopped our journey, but the good news is we can still get moving. We may not know every detail of our journey, but there are a couple of things we do know. First, we know our destination, namely the Father’s house.

The second thing we know is what steps we need to take to get moving again. We have seen the example; Christ has given us. He has shown us how to live and be his people. To get back on track, we should start with the important matters of Jesus’ example. Namely, let our steps be first and foremost acts of love, care and generosity. When we do not have the fullest picture of the next few days, weeks, or months of our journey, we should focus on the steps right in front of us.

Let us ask, who can I show love to today? Who needs encouragement today? Who needs an expression of generosity to get through a rough patch? I believe, that as we take these steps, Christ will reveal more and more the path before us. His full truth will become more evident, the further along we travel the Jesus way. And the further we travel the way and learn the truth, the more life we shall experience.

Maybe, the main reason we don’t feel, or experience very much of the abundant life, is because we try to shorten the process. We think, if we know the truth, that is enough to gain life, but that is not what Jesus tells us. He says to all of us that he is the “Way, the truth and the life.” If you want life, you must know the truth, and if you want truth, you must travel the way. There is no short cut. To mature us into the people Christ wants us to be, it takes obedience to his call to walk his way.

One, of the unsettling things that happens, at least to me, is driving on a road or highway and suddenly becoming anxious to know if I am on the right road. It is especially disconcerting when this happens at night. So, how do I find out, which road I am on? Well, I look for signs, or road markers.

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A sign that tells me that this is highway number 24 or a sign that tells me this is The Queensway. So, if I want to be sure I am on Jesus' way or road, how can I tell? What are the signs I should look for?

Some signs I have already mentioned, like those related to love and generosity but are there others? In considering this, I have thought that maybe the surest sign of whether we are on the right road and are moving the right way, comes from the experiences we have along the way. When was the last time I was truly challenged to grow in my faith? When was the last time I truly sacrificed for the good of another?

Do I build others up, or do I drain them of their energy and vitality? Do people respond positively to my presence, or do they regret they even know me? Do people know which road I am on, and is it the same one I profess to be on? Do I live as a person who knows where I am headed, namely my Father's house? Like those people on the airplane, I may be making good time but am I going anywhere?

If we truly want the abundant life Jesus offers us, we must ask repeatedly, "Which way did he go?" Because only when we discover where he is going can we truly follow to discover his truth and experience his life.