

# *How can we know the way?*

**John 14:1-7**

**FOCUS:** The church completes the journey, not because of programs, personality, or pension, but through a living relationship with Jesus.

**FUNCTION:** To invite the congregation to join me in a weekly engagement with scripture, that we would be nourished in the Way.

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## **John 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.”*

## **Sermon**

Greetings, my name is Ralph William Hawkins

and I am your new Senior Pastor/Head of Staff

and **I have absolutely no idea**

where we are headed after today

(I’d love to know what Scott McGrath is thinking right now.)

### ***No, let me tell you what I mean:***

I have absolutely no idea where we are headed after today

by which I mean to say

Who knows/who can imagine where the Lord will lead us together in this new season of your congregation’s life

I say “new season” → inevitably, for better or for worse, congregations mark the seasons of their faith journey with the coming/going of pastors

two years ago, a sig. 14 year season drew to a close → by all accounts, a fruitful, productive season ...

and now there is a new season of ministry open before you

and likewise there is in my life a new season open before me

and in fact, they are the same

An can any of us really know now (today!) where we will be in 5 years? 10 years? Can any of see the path perfectly laid out?

as the old hymn: *We walk by faith and not by sight*

**New seasons are always occasions for new faith, fresh faith**

## ***Others have stood at this place before us – disciples in Jn 14***

You think the season **in between pastors** is challenging

you should try the season in between **messiahs**

that is to say: between Jesus' staying and going and his coming again

Think with me for a moment  
about the experience of those earliest disciples  
Jesus calls them from their lives, to come and follow him ...

They witness and experience **extraordinary happenings** ...

miracles  
ministry  
musings

It is a **wild and crazy ride**

but they hang in there with Jesus

as long as they know he is not going anywhere

*Sure, I'll get on the roller coaster ride, as long as ...*

And then one day your **rabbi/teacher/leader** says to you:

*I am leaving you now, going on ahead of you, to prepare a place*

{mumble} *Did he just say what I think he just said?!*

Talk about **transitions** in ministry: Jesus is with them; Jesus is not

And the question becomes:

How will these disciples travel on?

How will they continue his ministry in this new season?

How will they know the way?

## ***As you might imagine, I've been thinking about this first Sunday with you for many months***

thinking and praying about what passage of scripture to preach

considering what **little slice of the gospel** would best capture my sense of what we can and should be about together

over the weeks, my thoughts kept returning to John 14 ...

And yet part of my was **trepidatious** in choosing this text

Because of Jesus' talk dwelling places ... (funerals)

But sometimes passages are **so overly associated** with certain moments/issues, we cannot hear them any other way

John 14 is usually thought of as a text about our **destination**

But what has captured my imagination in the weeks leading up to today *is the journey in getting there*

Jesus says: *You the way to the place where I am going*

Thomas says: *Actually, Lord, we do not know the way*

**Thomas's anxiety is understandable.** He has watched Jesus for three years. He has noticed that Jesus is rarely arbitrary. His ministry: one deliberate move after another, demonstrating ...

Thomas understands that *how we get there matters*

*Elizabeth and I just went through the process of stuffing everything we own into a big yellow truck ...*

*We knew well the destination – New Wilmington, PA 16142*

*But that's not enough: How would we know the way?*

*maps, conversation, planning*

*Plot the course well so that we could refuel the truck, Starbucks, donut*

Because the destination is crucial, the way we travel matters

*Lord, how can we know the way?!*

*I think that in many ways Thomas speaks for us all*

As we walk by faith and not by sight,

we are frequently tempted to settle for Lords less than Jesus  
simply because they are tangible, convenient, available

People and personalities; programs and paradigms  
that cannot save us or sanctify us

but offer the compelling criteria of **convenience**

Thomas wants/needs something he can hold on to

some kind of map, some set of rules  
some organizing principle or philosophy  
a moral/spiritual/ (heck) any kind of compass

something/someone who will substitute for a Jesus who  
is no longer going to be right next to him, holding his hand

Wouldn't it be nice if there was some kind of program we could  
purchase, some kind of schema we could secure

whereby we could ensure that this new season of your  
common life was successful, productive, not to mention

*Fruitful Ministry 2.0 - Presbyterian Edition*

*Actually we'd want to get 2.1 – That version accommodates bowties*

*Lord, we do not know where you are going.  
How can we know the way?*

*Jesus response to Thomas is startling:*

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

Because you know me, Thomas, you already know the way to  
where I am headed

You do not need something or someone else to substitute for  
me in what appears to me my absence

You need only to walk in the way I have walked  
You need only to discern the truth I have imparted to you  
You need only to live your life in and through mine

*Sisters and brothers in Christ*

the church's life is nourished and sustained

not through personality, programs, or pensions

the charisma of its leadership  
the cleverness of its planning and products  
the treasure it stores up for itself

the church is nourished and sustained because Christ is alive  
and offer himself as the means by which we journey

Christianity is finally not

- a set of moral principles by which we live ...
- an abstracted set of ideas about God ...
- a sociological phenomenon of like minded people

Christianity is a living connection to Jesus Christ

and through him, a living connection to the Triune God ...

What binds us together, what leads us along, is the  
irreplaceable, irreducible, inviolable livingness of Christ Jesus

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

## *One of the things I said to your PNC along the way*

not a guru  
not an entrepreneur  
not a larger than life figure

What I am is a  
preacher, minister of word and sacrament, *theologian*

Don't be put off by that last word,  
especially if it smacks of matters ethereal or elitist

I mean theologian in the simplest, most pragmatic sense

THEOS LOGI

God-words, God-speech, God-conversation

What I want to be about in the next season of my ministry  
is to be among a band of Presbyterian Christians

who want to place themselves in a living conversation with  
scripture, nourished by the sacraments, for the purpose of  
worship and work in and through Jesus Christ

I am not interested in living off of my personality  
I am not on a hunt for that magical program that will save  
the day  
I am grateful for but not beholden to the treasures gather for  
our pensions ...

I want to know and be known by Jesus Christ ...

I want to make this journey well, I want how we get where we  
are going to matter, to be faithful to the way/truth/life that has  
claimed and called us

I want to be a part of a congregation willing to be formed and  
reformed by what we encounter in these pages ...

## *So I make a deal with you today*

I will turn my face toward this ministry of word and sacrament  
with energy, intelligence, imagination and love

if you will likewise be prayerful and purposeful in our worship, in  
our engagement of God's word in Christ and in scripture, and in  
our common ministry together

We will you pray for me ...  
and I will pray for you ...

And if we live in this kind of space together, I am more than  
confident that Christ will be faithful to us

to love us and lead us in the way we should go

not only generally the way to the Father  
but specifically the ministries and missions and modalities  
set aside for this particular congregation

I am honored to set out on this journey with you, through the  
next season of your life together.

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But that's okay, b/c I know the One who does, and so do you  
Thanks be to God, and let the all God's people say AMEN.