

“Ready For The Journey”

The Rev. Drew Willard
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I Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

... *you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a people who are God's own possession.*

*You have become this people so that you may speak
of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness
into his amazing light.*

I Peter 2:9

Let us pray... O God,

Show us the way to live each day,

the life you set before us through Jesus' example of love, justice, and peace;
and show us how we are ready for the journey.

Amen

Driving up to Massachusetts on family trips from New Jersey to see relatives
would take us about 5 hours to go 300 miles.

I remember being amazed at how my father knew the way without a map –
you know, before there was GPS.

He probably looked at a map before the trip,

though I expect he was generally familiar with the signs along the way.

Still, I was impressed and wondered how I would ever be able to do that.

Since then, I have traveled on many road trips –
some even took me thousands of miles;

But when any of us are just starting out on something,
isn't it reasonable to have doubts about which way to go?

As the singer and author, Jimmy Buffet, was turning 50 years old,
he planned to go on a trip around the world!

A friend convinced him to take a more sober look at what he wanted to do;
So he narrowed his goal to a trip around the Caribbean.

As a pilot, he wanted to fly this adventure himself, and take his family along.

So, he acquired the right plane to do the job: a Grumman Albatross –
a flying boat he called *The Hemisphere Dancer*.

I enjoyed the book – especially as he described how he prepared for his journey
developing his list of supplies to take, pointing out the merits or shortcomings
of one thing or another.

And this was all to begin on his birthday, Christmas Day!

That night before – on Christmas Eve, after his family had all gone to bed,

Jimmy Buffet was still up - excited in anticipation of his trip,

and how he was about to set out on an adventure that would be
worthy of his grandfather, who himself had been a ship's captain!

Willard, p.2

There comes a time in our lives when we are ready to put ideas into action;

Like when a field of grain has become ripe, and it is time for the harvest,
like when our efforts are realized in passing a test for certification,
or entering the house you built yourself, or buying your first car
and setting out on your first long distance trip.

There comes a time when you are ready, but you don't necessarily know it yet...

As the disciples sat at table with Jesus

during their last supper with him in the upper room,

Jesus was preparing them for events that would soon come to fruition.

The disciple Thomas asked,

“Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?”

But Jesus reassured them all by saying,

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father,
but by me.”

At first this may sound exclusive –

as if the only people going to Heaven will be those

who belong to a specific group – a members-only club,

but I believe there is more to what Jesus is saying.

Christians were called people of The Way even before they were called ‘Christians’

and “The Way” literally has a parallel in Oriental philosophy

with the concept called the “Tao”, “The Way”.

Perhaps you have heard of the Tao De Ching, which is a collection of wisdom sayings
associated with Taoism.

The very first passage begins in this way:

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.

The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

The nameless is the beginning of heaven and Earth.

The named is the mother of the ten thousand things.

This reference to the “Tao” or the “Way” brings to mind the “Logos” or the “Word” –

that is found in the first chapter of the Gospel of John [CEB]:

*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.*

The Word was with God in the beginning.

*Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word nothing came into being.*

So, the “Way” of Eastern philosophy and the “Word” of Christianity
meet as concepts that are both associated with creation.

Willard, p.3

You know, there is an even simpler explanation to what this is all about:
love – compassion, rational loving-kindness.
Jesus was all about love – which is the way, the truth, and the life
all wrapped up into what matters most.

The resurrection stories tell us that Jesus wasn't recognized until he
did something or said something.
This tells us that Jesus didn't just teach his disciples intellectually,
but they learned from him just by being around him,
just by observing how he lived.

At the Spring Meeting of our Florida Conference,
our keynote speaker was J. Bennett Guess,
the Executive Minister for Local Church Ministries of the UCC,
He challenged us to have a bold vision, bold values to support that vision,
and to be a bold voice in society.
He told us about a chance meeting and a lesson learned from a young woman
who was passing out Gospel tracts at a rest stop
while he was traveling on a terrible, cold winter's day.
He realized she was there out of a real concern for others and the consequences
of their believing in Jesus – or not.
Ben Guess emphasized we as a denomination are about love, justice, reconciliation,
human worth and human dignity – because that was what Jesus was about.
He admitted Hell is real, but Heaven is, too,
and that Jesus Christ – whom we proclaim,
rescues people who find themselves in 'Hell', now
to bring them into the 'Heaven' that is possible, now.
Love is the Way and Jesus personifies love.

Ben Guess specifically challenged the Florida Conference of the UCC
to continue to be a bold public voice,
to encourage congregations to be extravagantly-welcoming,
to have 'engaged disciples', and 'excellent, diverse leaders'
who equip those disciples to talk about their faith.

He spoke specifically about the UCC lawsuit against North Carolina's law
defining marriage as only between a man and a woman
and prohibiting clergy from doing domestic unions –
as well as same-sex marriages.

He said the case challenges a state's interference
with 1st Amendment freedom of religion as well as
14th Amendment equal protection rights under the law.
Even the leader of the Southern Baptists admitted we have a 'convincing argument' –
so this case is expected to be won as a 'slam dunk'.

Willard, p.4

The way ahead for us as a denomination – and as a church, is opening up
and though we may not feel we are as ready as we would like,
opportunities are arising before us,
if we only hang on and keep on doing what we are doing...

To have a bold vision of Christ as our savior, now and not just the time to come;
to have bold values of justice and mercy, generosity and responsibility;
and to be a bold voice for these progressive values in our community.

How do we get there? How did those first disciples get there?

They remembered their life together with Jesus –
not only of what he said, but of what he did.

Like them, we just have to follow Jesus' example
as the Way to live, the Truth to tell, and the Life to share.

Amen

Our lesson from 1st Peter 2:2-10 is an encouragement to the early Christians that they have what it takes to make it as a community of faith – and that they already know the way to be the church in their time and place...

- [2]... like a newborn baby, [you] desire the pure milk of the word.
Nourished by it, you will grow into salvation,
[3] since you have tasted that the Lord is good.
- [4] Now you are coming to him as to a living stone.
Even though this stone was rejected by humans,
from God's perspective it is chosen, valuable.
- [5] You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple.
You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices
that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- [6] Thus it is written in scripture,
Look! I am laying a cornerstone in Zion, chosen, valuable.
The person who believes in him will never be shamed.
- [7] So God honors you who believe.
For those who refuse to believe, though,
the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone.
- [8] This is a stone that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall.
Because they refuse to believe in the word, they stumble.
Indeed, this is the end to which they were appointed.
- [9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a people who are God's own possession.
You have become this people so that you may speak
of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness
into his amazing light.
- [10] Once you weren't a people, but now you are God's people.
Once you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Let us be guided and challenged by these words.

John 14:1-14

[Jesus said,]

[1]"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God,
believe also in me.

[2] In my Father's house are many rooms;
if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

[3] And when I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

[4] And you know the way where I am going."

[5] Thomas said to him,

"Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"

[6] Jesus said to him,

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.

[7] If you had known me, you would have known my Father also;
henceforth you know him and have seen him."

[8] Philip said to him,

"Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied."

[9] Jesus said to him,

"Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip?

[The one] who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say,
'Show us the Father'?

[10] Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?

The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority;
but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

[11] Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me;

or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.

[12] "Truly, truly, I say to you,

[the one] who believes in me will also do the works that I do;

and greater works than these will [they] do, because I go to the Father.

[13] Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it,

that the Father may be glorified in the Son;

[14] if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.