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5/14/17--University Presbyterian Church
John 14:1-14

SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME

It is easy to see why our passage from the Gospel of John is a popular one for funerals. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure--in other words, for his death. He knows that very soon he will be arrested and killed. The end is close. And so he tries to offer some pastoral care to his followers, to give them hope and comfort in what will become a distressing situation for them. And so he makes this promise to his followers: I am going to prepare a place for you so that where I am, there you will be also. In other words, Jesus is preparing a home for us.

Now, this is a comforting message when we face the reality of death in our lives. When someone we love dies, we can find comfort and hope in the promises of our faith that our beloved has been received home by God. It reassures us to recall that a home is prepared for *us*, that when *we* die, we too will find a safe home, an everlasting home with our Creator.

But do we have to wait to die to find this home? What about now? What about while we're alive? I believe that most of our lives are spent trying to fill a longing for home. We each yearn for a sense of belonging, of being accepted. Regardless of whether we grew up in a loving home or an unloving home, regardless of whether we have managed to create a loving home for ourselves now or find ourselves in the midst of a troubled home, most of us still spend much of our lives yearning for and searching for home. We long for a state of being where we feel like we belong or that we are accepted. We crave a state of being where we feel secure and safe. We yearn for a condition of life where we know wholeness rather than brokenness. In the midst of

life's confusion, we look for some kind of refuge, a stabilizing presence. When faced with issues of futility and monotony, we long for meaning and purpose. Home.

As we all know, home is much more than a building, a house, or even a collection of people sharing the same dwelling. We might live in a house filled with people, people who love us, people who care about us, and still we may not feel "at home" with ourselves. Or, we may live alone, but have found a deep peace that quiets our hearts and calms our minds. We may live in the house that belonged to our parents and grandparents—the family home—and still not feel settled. Or we may travel constantly, be always on the go, and find that we feel at home wherever we land. Home is a mental, emotional, and spiritual state of being. The truth is, that I think there are very few people who truly feel as if they have found "home." For most of us, home is always somewhat elusive and so we search for it and strive for it.

So, how do we find home? Where can home be found? Jesus tells his followers that he goes to prepare a home for us—but does that mean we have to wait until we die? There is an element throughout the Gospel of John which we see surface here in this passage from today in which Jesus switches back and forth between the future and the present. You may recall in scripture how sometimes the kingdom of God is spoken of as being in the future, but then at other times the kingdom of God is said to be at hand. And here, in our passage today, Jesus again is switching between talk of what is to come and talk of what already is. For Jesus, home is not just a place we go when we die. Home is a way of living in the world right now. Jesus wants us to know home right now, on this side of the grave.

Just after Jesus tells his followers that he is going to prepare home for them, he tells them that they know the way to this home. The disciple Thomas is confused. "Hey Jesus! We don't

know where you are going so how can we know the way?" And that's when Jesus answers, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

This statement by Jesus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," is one that is both much loved by Christians and also much abused by Christians. This statement has reinforced the notion among some Christians of the exclusive path to God as being through Jesus, and unsettled other Christians who don't know how to reconcile this statement with their Muslim, Jewish, Hindu brothers and sisters who seek God in different paths. This passage has been a problematic passage for many Christians.

One approach we might take to help us find a way to deal with this text is to examine what we tend to emphasize in this short sentence. When Jesus says he is the way, the truth, and the life, how might we hear and respond to this passage differently if we shifted our emphasis from the word "the," to Jesus is *the* way. Putting the emphasis here makes this an exclusive statement. But what if we placed the emphasis on the word *Jesus*? So the answer to Thomas' question and our question, "How can we know the way home?" becomes: Jesus. *Jesus* is the way. Jesus is our way home. Through living the life called for by Jesus, by living the life modeled by Jesus himself, the life of love, forgiveness, service, thanksgiving, sacrificing, we will find our way home. Jesus *is* our way home.

I am also drawn to the word Jesus uses to describe how to get home. He says, "I am the way." *Way*. A way is a path, a course we travel. A way is a journey we undertake. And a way is different than a destination. A lot of Christians treat the faith as if it were a destination they have arrived at. I *am* a Christian. For some Christians, just affirming the words "I believe in Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior," is all that is needed to arrive at the destination of eternal salvation.

But look at what the gospels reveal about Jesus. The gospel accounts of Jesus' life and teachings reveal someone who showed us a way of living and loving. Jesus did not just come to raise us to life after we die but he spent far more time trying to raise us to new life right now while we are living. And he offers us a way of knowing that new life right now. It isn't an easy way. Love your enemies, Jesus teaches us. Forgive seventy times seven, he tells us. Turn the other cheek. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. Take up your cross and follow me, he says to us. The way of Jesus involves hard work, challenging work: loving difficult people, giving away our lives, forgiving those who hurt us, serving others, living humbly, caring about outcasts and marginalized peoples others would rather overlook. But Jesus knew that walking this way in the world is the path toward home. The sense of meaning, of belonging, of finding ourselves, is found in walking Jesus' way in this world. If you want to find home, *Jesus* is the way.

Like all paths, sometimes we veer off course. Sometimes we take a wrong turn. Sometimes we take one of the myriad other pathways offered to us in life. Maybe we take the path that leads to the shopping mall: the way we try to bring meaning and purpose and happiness to our lives with all our stuff. Maybe we walk the way of wealth, which we think will bring us the security and safety we seek. Maybe we have known the way addiction, how we have tried to dull our pain, our boredom, our anguish through alcohol and drugs and other addictive habits. There is the way of anger, the bitterness and injuries we cherish instead of striving to follow Christ's way of forgiveness. There is the way of personal pleasure, living primarily for our wants and desires. There are lots and lots of other "ways" we take in our quest for home. And yet, they will never take us there. We've been shown the way home. Jesus. The journey with Jesus is not just to a destination. The journey itself is home. In walking this way with Jesus, we

can discover the home we seek, as we journey through hardship and pain, through failures and mistakes. Because walking beside us, you see, is the Jesus of grace and love.

So, when we listen to Jesus say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," rather than disparaging sincere people of other faiths, maybe our primary focus should be on ourselves. How faithful are we in walking that pathway? Jesus has shown us the way home.