

By now, most of you have heard that I have accepted a new call and will be serving as an associate pastor at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in Excelsior, Minnesota. I know that in many ways, this change may come as a surprise, but I want you all to know how much I have loved being your pastor these past 6 years. And just because our time serving together in ministry is ending does not mean that the time we have shared is forgotten or less than. To the contrary, I look back on this season with immense gratitude and love in my heart, because I am no longer the same person I was when I first came here. I have grown and become more of the person and pastor God has called me to be because of this community. And I hope and pray you can look back and see the ways God has helped each of you grow as well. And what's more, I hope that you can see and believe that there is still so much good here, so much more opportunities to grow in faith and love, so many reasons to live in hope and joy. Because you are here. And God is here. And together, near or far, we share in one heart, one mind, and one body in Christ.

Such is the way of goodbyes. Someone goes, while another stays. And that can most certainly stir up within us a troubled heart. The questions of fear, sadness, and uncertainty plague us in such times. What will life be like now? What will the future hold? Will our paths cross someday? Will we be together again? And we are indeed in a season of goodbyes. Graduations. New opportunities. The passing of loved ones. We cannot avoid the realities that goodbyes are a part of our lived experience. And so no matter where you are, no matter what season of life you find yourself in, we can and should take notice of passages like these in John's Gospel.

Because we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus and the disciples were experiencing these things and more. And like the disciples, we each must continue to walk in the way that God has called us, even if there are times we cannot see clearly where we are going or what lies ahead. For we walk by faith and not by sight, as the Apostle Paul reminds us. Because we know the way. Now, Thomas, like so many before him, seems to misunderstand what Jesus is saying here. He wants directions or a GPS. But what he misses is that the way of Jesus is not so much a place, as it is, well, a way – a way of living and being in the world. It is not directions to a location, but an invitation into relationship. Because Jesus himself

– his life, his death, and his resurrection – is the way. Which means that whenever we embody the life that Christ himself has embodied – a life of goodness and truth, love and grace, forgiveness and mercy – we are participating in the life of God for the world. And when we embody the way of Christ, we are very much on the way.

But make no mistake, there are times when we can lose our way – when we seek our own understanding and desire to be right above all else. It is easy to turn what is a good and gracious promise into something that must be obeyed, earned, and deserved. When I was in seminary, whenever I would leave the apartment I would tell my roommate, “See you later!” To which he would reply, “Is that a promise or a threat?” How thin is the line between a word of grace and compassion to a word of judgment and exclusion? If we hear Jesus say, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,” and we jump at the chance to use them as a proof for why our faith is “the right one”, then we will have missed the point. We have missed the way.

In the midst of this touching moment, Jesus is not giving a command, but reiterating the promise that he has embodied throughout his life. These are not doctrinal or theological mandates, but words of comfort and assurance. That the time Jesus spent with his disciples was real. That the life they shared is real. That what they have seen and known and experienced will always be real. They have been in the presence of God having been in the presence of Jesus. And nothing of what is to come lessens that. Indeed, through the cross, the promise of the presence of God in Christ in every time and place and circumstance is made even more real. For nothing now can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

My friends in Christ, we know the way. We have experienced it for ourselves in countless ways. Through prayer and song, laughter and tears, service and care; through word and deed, joy and challenge, the bearing of the cross of our baptisms and sharing in the breaking of the bread, we indeed know the way. And all of it is real. It was and is and will always be real, as we live in faith and hope. No matter the road we walk, no matter how near or far we may be, no matter the many goodbyes that will occur throughout our life's journey, we are on the way. The way of Christ. The way into fullness of joy and love and life. Thanks be to God! Amen.