

## ***Knowing the Road, Following the Road***

A Sermon by *the Rev. Dr. Joseph David Stinson*,  
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*Preached on the Fifth Sunday of Easter, (22May), 2011.*

Text: John 13:36-14:7

“Jesus said, I am the Road, also the truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me.” John 14:6

We have just heard one of the most famous teachings of Jesus in John 14:6, “*No one gets to the Father except by me.*” Is it an exclusive truth claim teaching that there is no other way to salvation besides faith in Jesus? Bishop Lesslie Newbigin in his commentary on the Gospel of John<sup>1</sup> asks us to read together the last verses of chapter 13 with the first few in 14. In so doing we get a different perspective on Jesus’ and John’s meaning. Would John, who was himself a good and faithful Jew and who must have known many Jewish friends who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, have thought this was Jesus’ meaning? Though John lived in a time of conflict between church and the synagogue, it is unlikely that he believed members of God’s chosen people damned. Paul said in his letter to the Romans, ‘All Israel will be saved.’<sup>2</sup> As Jesus said, there is ample room in the Father’s house. The meaning here is not how few of us will get there but the way we can get there. When Newbigin asks us to look at that last part of chapter 13 alongside 14, this teaches us Jesus’ cross is the way to God, not the exclusive claim that Jesus is the *only* way into heaven. Let me explain.

The interpretation Jesus’ comment hinges on the meaning of the word *way*. Eugene Peterson translated this word as *road*. Let me read his translation in *The Message*, starting with 13:36 at the end of the Last Supper account:

Simon Peter asked, “Master, just where are you going?”

Jesus answered, “You can’t follow me where I’m going. You will follow later.”

“Master,” said Peter, “why can’t I follow you now? I’ll lay down my life for you!”

“Really? You’ll lay down your life for me? The truth is that before the rooster crows, you’ll deny me three times.

“Don’t let this throw you. You trust God, don’t you? Trust me. There is plenty of room in my Father’s home. If that weren’t so, would I have told you that I’m on my way to get a

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<sup>1</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Light Has Come*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 177-182.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 11:26. The entire of chapters 9-11 deals with the question of God’s intent to save Gentile and Jew.

room ready for you? And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live. And you already know the road I'm taking."

Thomas said, "Master, we have no idea where you're going. How do you expect us to know the road?"

Jesus said, "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus teaches his path is the way to God. What was his path? "Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was ... necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised."<sup>4</sup> So when Jesus spoke about the road, his road, he spoke of the necessity of the cross. Moreover, "Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to come after me, let them deny self, take up a cross and follow me.'"<sup>5</sup> Jesus believed the cross was his destiny and life's purpose. The cross was the way God vindicated him and redeemed the world. More, the cross was also the way for his followers. The cross was so much part of who Jesus was he did not say, "my cross is the way," but rather, "I am the Way...."

As he talked about the Way and where he would lead his disciples, he used the language of home. It is not just that there is an unknown somewhere beyond death, but it is our *home*. Peterson translated it: "Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live."<sup>6</sup> I take this to mean that where Jesus went and where all of us will meet him is not just some ethereal, never-never land, but rather *the* place we belong, *our heart's true home*.<sup>7</sup> Jesus knows the way there and we will follow him there.

I also want you to notice John did not intend to assert that Jesus is one of many saviors, as if it doesn't matter what we believe. Look at Jesus' exchange with Peter and Thomas. Peter asked him, "Where are you going?" Jesus gave an answer that is not an answer: "*You know the way*." Thomas' response expressed his confusion. "If we do not know the destination of our journey, how can we know the route?"<sup>8</sup> The reality is that no one, then or now has a map for what comes next: for the end of the world or for life after death. We only know there is a curtain that separates us in this life from what comes next. Jesus taught that he opened our way by taking

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<sup>3</sup> John 13:36-14:6, *The Message*, translated by Eugene Peterson. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 16:21.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 16:24.

<sup>6</sup> John 14:2-3.

<sup>7</sup> See Hebrews 11:14. Also, Richard Foster's *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Newbiggen's paraphrase, 181.

the road first.<sup>9</sup> “Later,” he told Peter, “you will follow me there.” No view is expressed here in John that there are many ways to go behind the curtain, to God. There is only the certainty that Jesus knew the way, that he led the way. Jesus is the pioneer of our faith,<sup>10</sup> going before us and showing us the way. This is not to claim that God has left no witness to the truth in other religions. However, given what we know about Jesus—that he is God and reveals God firsthand—the issue of whether other religions possess truth is academic. We know Jesus’ way of the cross. We know the truth and the life that we have found in him. Why follow someone else when Jesus beckons us to follow him? Jesus and John did not make a sword-in-the-sand stand on the truth claims of other faiths. (That appears not to be what they were speaking about.) Instead they intended to criticize the hubris of humans who think we can get behind the curtain through our own efforts, experience and intellect. *That*, Jesus said, is a blind alley. The path is through what Jesus revealed to us: the road, the truth, and the life. We find our true home by following him, not debating.

Jesus said that if you really know him, you know the Father. He told his disciples they had *seen* God. This still confused and so Philip said, “Master, show us the Father and then we will be content.” Jesus reply was sharp but still patient, “Philip, you’ve been with me all this time and you still don’t understand? To see me is to see the Father.”<sup>11</sup> At a certain point, it does not help to try to argue anyone into faith in Jesus. Rather our focus is Jesus and following him. His road leads to the cross, but then there is something beyond the cross: a home not made with hands, not subject to recessions, not characterized by separation and loss. Rather it is the place we were born to be, in ‘the everlasting arms.’

I’m on this road. Join me.

End

Knowing and Following the Road.DOC

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<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 10:20, “the new and living way which he opened us through the curtain.” This is, of course, an allusion to the curtain in the Temple which separated people from the Holy of Holies and, hence, from the presence of God. Note also Matthew’s interesting comment in Matthew 27:51. “At the moment [of Jesus’ death], the Temple curtain was ripped in two, top to bottom.”

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 12:2. Jesus is “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

<sup>11</sup> John 14:7-9.