

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Do you know the way? I thought I knew the way. Life had a certain rhythm to it – I had shaped my life on Gabriola, it was familiar and felt a bit lived in. But then things changed. We're not allowed to gather with people, we can't even get close to them, our favourite parks are closed, there are long lines at the grocery store, and besides that a part of us is afraid to go out . . . we can't seem to either relax or get things done. These days we take a few steps, look around and say, "well, the way has never looked like this before," and digging in our packs for our maps, those around us respond by saying, "yeah we don't know where we are, but at least we haven't lost each other." "Don't even bother looking for your map, we can't find ours either." Luckily Jesus is still right where he said he would be . . . he has gone ahead to prepare a place for us.

Even during a pandemic, we are faced with difficult scriptures that with a soundbite can for some of us easily turn our brains off. Often they are a problem for us because they have been narrowly understood and misused to used to hurt people . . .

and there are so many. This morning's is "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." I've said it before, and I say it to you again: won't you join me in unhooking our pre-judgement of this scripture. Let's take a fresh look at these words this morning.

When I read the text this week, I suddenly imagined reading a comic strip conversation between Jesus and his disciples:

Jesus: "I'm going ahead of you to prepare a place for you so we can be together again. You know the way." The disciples are like, "Uh, we don't know where you are going. Which way?"

Jesus patiently reminds them: "I am the way. You know me, don't you? And you know the Father." "Ooo, show us the Father!"

Jesus takes a deep breath: "I'm right here. The Father is in me . . . ok, let me start again from the beginning . . ."

Whenever we're feeling bad about not understanding Jesus, we need only look to the disciples for comfort, because they were confused it seems most of the time. Jesus spends years teaching

them. And some do get it, others get pieces of it, and for still others, parts of them get it. You know that feeling where your understanding is compartmentalized? While I was growing up things like the Lord's Prayer and the doxology were only available to me in worship – I just couldn't remember them otherwise, but the words came right to me at the appropriate time in the liturgy. In all fairness, Jesus' teaching is extremely difficult. Take the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven – it's like a mustard seed, it's like leavening for bread, it's like a treasure hidden in a field, it's like a merchant seeking pearls . . . so many parables . . . Jesus what are you talking about?? A good bunch of us have been reading and discussing Cynthia Bourgeault's book *The Wisdom Jesus*, in which she suggests Jesus is a wisdom teacher, and reframes him and his teaching through the lens of the wisdom tradition. Through the lens of the wisdom tradition, the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus is describing not a place, is not the afterlife, is not an actual house with many dwelling places, but a state of consciousness, where there is no separation between God and humans, nor between humans and other humans.¹ The

Kingdom of Heaven is not something we can easily grasp, but we see openings to it in moments of true vulnerability, in moments of justice being done, in acts of service for others. It happens when social rules and power move to the background and our humanity moves to the foreground. The world looks slightly different to us in these moments in a way that is difficult to put into words. The Kingdom of Heaven can be opened intentionally in the practice of meditation or centering prayer.

It's a big concept – we might get it for a fleeting moment and then it flies away again. Jesus teaches the disciples for maybe 3 years, the Kingdom of Heaven being central to his message, and then he says 'I'm going there to live. You know the way, because I have been teaching you how to get there by changing your state of consciousness; do what I have taught you and you will find your way to me. When I am gone you can find me there.' It's no wonder the Kingdom of Heaven is present in moments of vulnerability, service and justice – these are things Jesus taught – he fought (and taught those around him to fight) for humanity, not power, for dignity of human life and dignity of all of creation.

¹ *Wisdom Jesus*, 31.

What Jesus teaches is the way of God – Jesus is the Verb of God, what he does are God's words manifest in the world. Jesus does give them a road map for the Way. By following ways of service and justice and relationship with God, we access this state of consciousness where the universal Christ dwells, the universal Christ that was made manifest in the world in the person of Jesus. Christ can be found in the voice of someone lonely on the phone, in the wave of a neighbour in thanks for a grocery delivery, in an image of a hospital worker at the bedside of a patient, in the justice that will be served to governments whose policies and actions disregard the good of its people.

Read John 14:1-11

"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." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Thanks be to God.