

Easter V Year A

“And Thomas said to him...How can we know the way? And Jesus said to him I am the way, the truth and the life.”

Fifteen or so years ago when Katharine and I were trying to discern if I were called to be a priest of the church...we had no idea how difficult the journey would be...that's kind of true about a lot of the choices in life we make isn't it...In some cases, had we known, had we been able to foresee the difficulties that would ensue because of a choice we would make...we might not have done it (like having children...just kidding)...The prophet Jeremiah, a prophet with a decided attitude, laments to God that God dupes us into God's purposes...the word in Hebrew is best translated seduces us...seduces us, lures us into what God would have us do. In the Book of Proverbs there is the admonition to look before you leap...and then just a few lines over the admonition that he who hesitates is lost...I love that... classic Hebrew theology, pointing up the ambiguity of life... And even though Billy Graham says God knows our individual life plans inside and out...I'm not so sure God Godself knows how it all turns out...because we, we made in God's image, all have experienced life as an ambiguous journey, a process full of potential and infinite possibility, and uncertainty and danger... a process rife with mystery that is at once painful and joyful, deflating and exhilarating, and sometimes downright boring... and ours as people of faith is to trust that the process, all of it, is good...that our choices perhaps good and bad lead us towards an unlikely ultimate good...that trust is hard most of the time, at least for me.

Mine and Katharine's journey to Austin for me to attend seminary was delayed for a year because the bishop thought we weren't ready to go. I had already arranged for my business partner to buy my share of the business, the financing of which took a good year to put together...I had served in just about every lay capacity in the diocese for some twenty years, so I felt confident I would be sent off to seminary...you know...maybe with a bit of fanfare...but we were told to wait...wait and come back to the bishop and the commission on ministry to be considered again next year. I said on the way home I'd sell the business anyway...Katharine and I decided that if I weren't approved the next year we would open a restaurant...we were good cooks after all. We got home after the meeting with the bishop, my mother and children waiting on us already knowing the news and all we knew to do was cry...Lucky for us my partner kept me on

staff as a consultant for a year, but the delay cost us plenty....You can tell I've got all that anger worked out.

But a mantra between Katharine and me emerged in this period of waiting, and that was, "trust the process." Whether the decision of delay was right or not we made up our minds that we would trust the way ahead....I would say often those words to myself and out loud before during and after seminary and I say them to myself even to this day.

Now this is just our story...but you know your own story...the times when things get down to the heart of the matter, and things seem a dead end...all we can do is trust that this process called life that we are in is worth trusting, worth the trouble, that this process we are in ultimately is good...dealing with addiction, with depression, with finances, our family relationships, the good ones and broken ones, our jobs, or lack thereof...our fear for our loved ones in danger of any kind...for the happiness of our children....but we also most vitally have to recognize that this process is larger than any one of us or any two of us....that the process has exponential connections to the world around us....If we could but claim that perspective then our singular issues of process don't seem quite as daunting....we are here to serve a greater good....*this process we are in is called creation... Jesus calls the secret of living in it, the Way.

The principal theme in the Gospel of John is that if one knows Jesus then one knows God....and Jesus spends most of this Gospel speaking metaphorically about who he is and therefore who God is, and therefore who we are as Christ's body...I am shepherd, I am doorway....I am Light....I am vine.....I am truth...I am life....I am way...You remember God's answer to Moses as to God's identity... the ambiguous answer.... "I am"....these words would not at all be lost on the hearers of this passage....*All of these metaphors I want to suggest are about process: Doorway...the means of entering or departing....shepherd, the tending to one's livelihood; light, the transmission of life giving energy at 186,000 miles a second; truth, that ever evolving mystery of knowledge; life, perhaps the highest metaphor for process and its ambiguity; life a process, of unlikely becoming....and finally Way....and that's what I want to concentrate on today....because in the midst of this earthly process, when things get to the heart of the matter, to the down and dirty, we need a way ahead...In the narrative, Jesus has just identified his betrayer....a betrayal which will lead to his death...He has foretold that his right hand man Peter will deny his association with him... but in the midst of this deathly crisis he says... there is a way...and of course Thomas, the skeptic, asks what way?.....and Jesus tells him that he, within whom the father God lives, is the way.....I am the Way..... Jesus the

Way, not just an individual, but an archetype... Jesus a process, Jesus a journey, Jesus a means of living....So I am saying to us that God is process, the very process that all of us are in.... peaks and valleys, the whole mess, our falling short....all is a part of the God process....God in God's becoming and we in it because it's what we're made for....God not aloof in the heavens, but God evolving with us....the only sure thing in the universe being potential....Now I think that requires heroism on our part to believe such an audacious thing That the writer of John teaches us....We are asked to live in such a way that the goodness of this grand process of God is served, because the salvation of the world is at stake....To live the way...the way of forgiveness (even in our own families...that's the hardest kind)....to live the way of compassion and mercy....to live for the livelihood of our neighbor....to swallow our fear and pride and embrace the stranger among us....to pour ourselves out as nurture for the world....to live the Way is to join God in God's own process of becoming....and to join God's own mission to pour out God's life for the world.

In my Father's house are many rooms, Jesus assures his followers... We mostly hear that at funerals assuming that Jesus is speaking of a comfortable spot with hotel-esque amenities in the afterlife (soap, an honor bar, perhaps)....but Jesus is speaking of the Way in the present...the process now....God's commonweal ever becoming in this world, never complete, always in process and so very near....Jesus is speaking of making sacred dignified space...a sacred dignified place for each and every one of God's children....That means that immigration reform is a Gospel issue along this Way.....With respect to Israel's friendship with us, it means that making sacred place for exiled Palestinians...a bona-fide homeland, is a gospel issue as well along this way....that healthcare....the empowerment of our least to have access to the same rudiments of disease prevention and healing as the well-to-do in our world is a gospel issue....that workers rights and safety in the workplace are honored, a gospel issue....our voice belongs in the world; We are called into the world via the realm of anxiety the poet reminds us... and perhaps our voice might seem an alien voice....but it is the voice that in the midst of the way...amidst the continued becoming of creation....It is a voice that must uphold the signposts of the Way for all to see..... the signposts of mercy, compassion, forgiveness, invitation, fair-play, inclusion and justice....these are signposts of the way to which we attend as vocation... Now these four complex issues I have mentioned, and there are many more as you know....I don't mean to say we have the answers...we have gifted experts to work towards figuring them out...*but*... we are experts of the Way....We have something to say as to the means by which

these problems are addressed...If the proposed expert solution for issue A is not about dignity and justice and fairness.....then we oppose such a solution.....If the remedy for issue B includes the interest of all including the voiceless, then we affirm the remedy....W.H. Auden in the hymn we will sing calls this way the way of unlikeness....an unlikely, different way from the way of a world that worships wealth and power.....Our way, Jesus's way....the way of God in process, we bearing God's image, will require everything of us...we are a priesthood of light dear people of God, light, a process of enlightening the world with God's love, energizing the world with the will to live justly and peaceably...Light that just might engender the moral authority among the powers of the world to do the right thing...
Imagine that.

So we must for the world's sake trust this Way, think this way, speak this way, live this way...this sacred process....this sacred becoming.....and call it good even if it doesn't seem so at times...trust the audacity of our call...namely that if you know the way of Jesus then you know the way of God...and most importantly that we are sent as he is sent into the world to live a way of life which will redeem all in all....Our work hasn't an end; it is a process that engenders hope and potential, hope and potential for a world in which justice and dignity are shared by all....and there are the glimpses of where this is all headed along the way...justice breaking out as we speak... freedom breaking out as we speak...glimpses of truth... we just have to pay attention to the process, the becoming, and let live our imaginations for joy.

He is the way...follow him into the land of unlikeness.....even amid the anxiety and ambiguity, for which we will need courage.....We will meet rare and wild beasts...and what an adventure it will be....Don with humility, brothers and sisters, your mantle of the heroic and trust the grand process.... See you good people along the way.