

The Fifth Sunday of Easter: We Need Directions, Jesus!

My wife and I were needing to give directions to someone, to a friend, recently who was meeting up with us and I asked Rosanna if she could take care of it because I was busy getting us ready to go. She responded to me saying, “I’m not sure where we are going exactly so I don’t know the way.”

Well, as you can imagine, since I had this Gospel passage that we heard today on my mind, I got pretty excited. I immediately said to her, “Well, Rosanna, Thomas said to Jesus, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Do you know what Jesus said to Thomas?” Of course, by now Rosanna was looking at me like, “A priest? Did you have to become a priest of all things? When we met you had so much promise.” But she obliged and being a student of the Scriptures herself, she replied, “Jesus said, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the *light*.’”

“Very good, Rosanna!” I interrupted her. “But wait a second, did you say, ‘the light?’ It’s actually ‘the life.’ That’s a common misquotation. Jesus is also called ‘the light’ but that’s earlier in John’s Gospel.”

Rosanna responded, “Directions! We just need to give her directions or something to plug into her GPS!” At this point, being the quick learner that I am, I sensed just a bit of irritation and I said, “Oh, I can help with directions. No problem.”

In fact, I’m tempted to give you all directions this morning, too. I could give you a list: go here, turn there, look for this, say that. Perhaps we are with Thomas on this one. Jesus says, “In my Father’s house, there are many dwelling places” -- many rooms, as some translations say -- “and I go to prepare a place for you.” Thomas said to Jesus, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way.”

Directions would get us there! It sounds like we just need directions. We just need directions or a landmark or something to plug into our GPS or smartphones that will get us there!

Our Gospel dialogue between Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples is actually about a bigger struggle having to do with what it means to be human. Since the beginning of time, humanity has had a sense of wonder and a sense of worship. We have in our souls this curiosity about God. We have this aching for something -- for someone -- who is larger than ourselves, even larger than our imaginations.

We find in the Judeo-Christian tradition particular stories -- sacred stories -- that speak to this part of who we are. We hear stories of moments when God has come near such as with our Father Abraham and Mother Sarah. We hear of people who have encountered God and through whom God has acted like with Moses and Elijah. We read these sacred stories and yet, like Jesus' disciples, like Philip, we say for ourselves, "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied." We ask the same questions people have always asked about who this divine force in the universe and is what it's all about. We must ask these questions for ourselves. We must engage this struggle for ourselves or we wouldn't be people at all.

It is no wonder that when Jesus and his disciples are talking about this, too, that his disciples think Jesus is talking about a location, a place, where God is located. "We need directions, Jesus! We don't know the way! God has appeared on mountain tops and temple mounts before, so take us there. Show us the way. Stop all this jabbering and give us some directions!"

But Jesus is not talking about a place or a location. He isn't talking about a destination you can travel to. "In my Father's house, there are many rooms." It isn't a reference to a house at all. He's talking about a household -- a household of

relationships. Preparing a place means mediating a relationship between us and this God whom we've been curious about since we first had words to say.¹

Again, returning to the text of our Gospel reading, Jesus says, "I go and prepare a place for you... and if I do this... I will come and take you to *myself*, so that where I am, you may be also." It's about that *where I am*. It's about *where Jesus is*. Oh, it's not a place. We don't need directions after all. It's a relationship, a relationship with Jesus of Nazareth.²

We can continue to press him. We can counter and say, "Directions! I need directions! How do I get to heaven! How do I get kids into a good college? How do I find the right retirement home? How do I survive a pandemic? We could use some directions here, Jesus! How can we know where you're going if we don't know the way?"

Jesus answers us saying, "You know me. Be in relationship with me." Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.... If you know me, you know my Father also." Those are the only directions we are going to get today. The destination address is "Relationship with Christ." Relationship with Christ -- punch that into your GPS!

¹ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, 4th Edition* (OUP: New York, 2010), New Testament, 1906. See footnotes for John 14:1-14.

² Ibid.