

St. John's Lutheran Church  
March 12, 2008

"I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"  
John 14:1-7

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Dear students in preparation for the celebration of the affirmation of your baptisms, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

I have too many maps in the glove box of my vehicle! I have a map of the State of Minnesota and a map of the State of North Dakota and a map of the State of South Dakota and a map of the state of Iowa! Too many maps! I have a map of the State of Wisconsin and a map of the State of Illinois and a map of the State of Nebraska, and a map of the State of Missouri! Too many maps! I have a map of the State of Arkansas, a map of the State of Colorado, a map of the State of Tennessee, and a Street Map of the City of Memphis Tennessee. Too many maps! I have too many maps in the glove box of my vehicle.

On a recent evening I was stopped by a Lakeville Police officer while I was driving in the city and he asked if I had proof of insurance in my vehicle. "I certainly do," I replied with confidence. "It's in my glove box." And I reached over to open the glove box and pulled out my stack of maps that held my proof of insurance somewhere nestled in the midst of them. While he waited patiently with his flashlight shining on my stack of maps I thumbed my way through my maps, from beginning to end and did not see my proof of insurance. "I am sorry," I said, "I know its here. Let me look through one more time."

"You know what," the police officer said, "I'm going to believe you for now and go back to my vehicle to check your driver's license." Of course, as soon as he left my window I found my proof of insurance in the midst of my maps. And as I waited for his return to my window, I was thinking, "Gregg Helland, you have too many maps."

The problem of having too many maps is not isolated to the glove box of my vehicle. Actually, the problem of having too many maps is a universal problem among all of humankind. I am thinking about maps in regard to where members of humankind ultimately believe they want to go in our earthly lives.

One form these maps take in our current society is in the form of books, magazines, and magazine articles of the "How to..." nature. This material offers an infinite number of helpful maps on how to be this and how to do that. It is clear that one of the reasons we have so many maps among humankind is because we have such a difference of opinion as to where we ultimately want to go in our earthly lives and what is important to us in our earthly lives. If you asked the simple question to ten different people tonight, "Where would you like to ultimately end up in your earthly life," there would likely be ten different responses that you would get. We have too many possible destinations in this life and too many maps to get there.

From at least his perspective, Jesus simplifies this map-reading a great deal in the Gospel for tonight from the Gospel of John, the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter. The background behind this reading is that Jesus is eating his Last Supper with his disciples. And as they are eating, Jesus is aware that he has come to the end of his earthly life. And he says to the disciples, "Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me (but) where I am going you cannot come."

And it is Peter who makes it pretty clear as to where he wants to go in his earthly life. Peter wants to go wherever Jesus goes. It is Peter's goal in earthly life to simply be with Jesus. "Lord, where are you going?" says Peter. And Jesus answers, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." And Peter responds, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you!"

And it is at that point that our reading for this evening begins with Jesus replying to Peter and the rest of the disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." And then Jesus goes on to clarify his destination at the end of this earthly life and where it is that he plans to go. "In my Father's house," says Jesus, "there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" It is Jesus' intention to complete his earthly life by going to reside in his Father's house in heaven.

This, then, simply put, is the final destination in this earthly life. It is our Father's house in heaven. There is much to do along the way. There are many stops to be made along the way. There are many different ways to spend our time along the way. But the final destination in this earthly life is clear. It is to arrive, safe and sound, in our Father's house in heaven.

Christianity, of course, is not the only religion that has an ultimate goal in this earthly life. There are other religions as well that offer an ultimate destination, of sorts, for their adherents, that to some degree might

be compared to the Christian heaven. And so it is that even various religions have different road maps to the ultimate destination of earthly life.

For his followers, Jesus is clear that there is only one map to our Father's house in heaven. To begin to collect a variety of maps that might each offer their own route to our Father's house is to confuse the issue. And Jesus wants to keep it simple.

But the one map to our Father's house in heaven that Jesus offers is a little surprising to his disciples and perhaps still even a little surprising also to us. For when Jesus offers his disciples the road map to his Father's house, what Jesus offers is himself. "If I go and prepare a place for you," said Jesus, "I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

In my late high school and college years, when I was living in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, I worked at K-Mart Foods. For six years I worked in the same grocery store. I ran a cash register, bagged groceries, hauled groceries out to cars, and stocked shelves. I knew where every item in the store was located. I knew the number of the aisle, what shelf it was on, and how far down on the shelf it was located.

I was not alone. There were other employees at K-Mart Foods like me. It was often the case that customers asked us, as we were working in the aisles, where a particular item was. I can remember responding with a verbal map. "You will find it in aisle 7, on the left hand side, the third shelf down, just to the right of the kitchen matches," or some such verbal road map to the item that the customer desired. I remember being proud that I could offer such a detailed map as to how to find the item.

I have often thought about that in my adult life when I am now the shopper. And I am the one who is having difficulty finding a particular item. And, perhaps with better emphasis in more modern times on customer service, it is not unusual today, if I find an employee and ask where to find a certain item that the employee just offers a smile and says, "Come with me." And the employee leads me down the aisles to where the item is and perhaps even takes one down off the shelf and hands one to me. It is a means whereby the employee him or her self has become the map to the item.

It is what Jesus is saying when he says to Peter and his disciples, "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." Jesus is indicating that there will come a day when he will return to his disciples to personally escort his disciples to his Father's house.

Thomas was the disciple who, perhaps, didn't quite get the point. That Jesus was offering himself as the one map to his Father's house. "Lord, we do not know where you are going," said Thomas. "How can we know the way?" So, more clearly yet, Jesus made his reply, saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

And in so saying, Jesus is perhaps looking just a bit more short-term, into the future, to his death that lay around the corner the following day, in the afternoon. For Jesus knew that he was headed to the cross. And Jesus knew that on that cross he would make satisfaction for the sins of all humankind. In order that all who would believe in him might not perish but rather look forward to living eternally in his Father's house.

On his cross, Jesus would lay down the road to his Father's house. Believers in him would walk through that cross into his Father's house. Believers in him would walk along the road of grace that was paved for them in the blood shed upon that cross. It would be on that cross that believers in him would gain access into his Father's house.

But, even so, the map to the house would remain a personal map. And there would be only one. What will happen at the end of your earthly life, dear friend in Christ, when you approach the final doorway that is death? Jesus himself will be standing there to greet you. He will offer you his arm. "I am the way, the truth and the life," he will say. "I have come. I have come to take you to myself. In order that where I am, there you may be also."