

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
The Five Part Story: Jesus is the Way to God
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September 29, 2019

Psalm 86:8-13; John 14:1-7

I am a gadget guy. I love all kinds of gadgets as long as they are not too expensive, or I can buy them refurbished, I will get them to play around with. One gadget I bought years ago was this small, square piece of electronic amazement...my first GPS. In my previous church I drove thousands of miles to visit churches all across south Texas. I thought that this would come in handy, but as it turned out, I never actually used it, until Cindy and I went on a visit to visit friends living in Olympia, Washington. We were arriving at the airport after 10pm and would have to find our way not only to a street address but to their condo, buried deep within a large condo-complex. When Cindy asked about finding our way, I told her it would not be an issue since I had a GPS, as I secretly kept saying to myself, "Please work." Well we got our car, set up the GPS, plugged in the address and dutifully followed the instructions. It got us to the complex and then navigated us deeper and deeper into the condo darkness. Finally, there was no more road. Frustrated, I asked Cindy to use the cell-phone and call. Our friends answered and said that they would turn on their porch light...and right in front of us this light came on. At that moment I could hear the technology angels singing.

How many of you have used one of these things...or these days used your phone, or one in your car? They are amazing, aren't they? They can tell you not only your route and where to turn, but let you know when you are at your destination and then what services are available when you get there. Over the years, as I have pondered this technology, what has come to me again and again, is that I wish I had one for showing me exactly what God would like for me to do. One that I could punch in my dilemma and up would come the appropriate instructions for doing the will of God in my life. One that would accurately take me to God. Sort of a God positioning satellite. Any of you ever wish you had one of those? Well if you, like me, wish you had one...you do...we do. We have Jesus of Nazareth. He is our GPS, our God Positioning Son. This is in fact the claim that he is making in this 14th Chapter of John, when he and the disciples are about to head out into the mess of his arrest and crucifixion. He tells them that he is the way, and the truth and the life, and that no one comes to the father except through him. In saying these words Jesus is not giving us a password to heaven, but an invitation to a life-long journey. He is inviting us on a journey in which we discover how to live as human beings who reflect the image of God into the world.

First, Jesus is the way. I don't know about your GPS, but mine has a blue line showing me the way I ought to go. If the little, here-I-am icon is on the blue line, I know that I am on my way. This is how that "the way" is used in scripture. The way describes a journey into the heart of God. If we look at the Psalm from this morning, we read. "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in truth." We will come to the truth in a minute. What the Psalmist is asking for are the directions, the way, to God in order that he or she might walk, might live, in the right manner. The image in Hebrew and later in Greek for "the way", is literally the right path. So, when Jesus tells his disciples that he is the way, he is telling them to follow him, follow his way of life, if they desire to encounter God. We know this because Thomas, earlier in the upper room said, "we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the

way?” Jesus reply is, follow me. And what does that following look like? It looks like what Jesus had just done for the disciples, he had taken off his outer garment, taken up a towel and washed their feet like a servant. After which he said, as I have done for you, do for others. In other words, Jesus is telling them that the way to God, is the way of the servant. We can see this in the other Gospels when Jesus tells his friends, I have come not to be served but to serve. And in Philippians Paul writes that Jesus humbled himself becoming a servant. Our GPS, our God Positioning Son says follow the way of Jesus; the way of the servant.

Second, Jesus is the truth. One of the great things about GPS is that it helps me not only with my route, but it reminds me of best practices while I am driving that route, such as staying within the speed limit...which I have to say is irritating, but still necessary. Perhaps surprisingly to many of us, that is what the truth is all about. It is about helping us practice a life that is true, or faithful, to God’s desires for humanity. I realize that this may sound odd. Normally when we think of truth, or what is true, we think of facts, or things that are provable. This is not what truth means in scripture. One way to understand this is to return to our Psalm. “Teach me your way O Lord, that I may walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart...” The truth in this case has nothing to do with facts, it has to do with living, or practicing faithfulness. It is practicing the way of loving God and loving neighbor. It is a reminder for us not just to stay on the main route following Jesus as a servant, but to follow the practices Jesus showed us. There are many of these practices; compassion, honesty, humility, prayer, acceptance of outsiders, among them. But perhaps the greatest of these is forgiveness. I say this because Jesus makes it clear that forgiveness is an act of God. We can see this in the story of the Prodigal son, in Jesus forgiving the woman caught in adultery and in forgiving Peter after his betrayal. For John then, one of the practices of Jesus that we are to follow, is that of forgiveness, because forgiveness demonstrates the image of God, as the one who forgives. Our GPS, our God Positioning Son says follow the way of the servant and practice forgiving.

Finally, Jesus is the life. As I got used to using my GPS, one of the things that I appreciated was that you could see your destination and you knew how long it would take you to get there. It was kind of fun when my daughter and I used the GPS when we drove her to college in Oregon. However, on one stretch though, it said take a left in 324 miles, which meant the distance seemed to take forever to traverse. Even I was asking are we there yet? And I think that in some ways, this is the way getting to God seems...it takes a life time. But what Jesus offers that differs from our trips with a GPS, is that we get to enjoy the destination now. We get to enjoy the life God offers us now, because Jesus is the life. And what is this life? It is being enfolded in the very love of God. It is experiencing the ever-growing love of God the more that we follow in the way of Jesus and live the practices that Jesus taught. I say this because as we discovered three weeks ago, in part one of the Five Part Story, that God is love and that God pours God’s love out for the world.

Jesus is the way to God and Jesus invites us on the journey. What I would like you to do this morning with your sticky note is this, to think of one Jesus’ practice...compassion, forgiveness, humility, prayer that you would like to work on this week as part of your journey, write it down and then take it home, to remind you that Jesus is the way to God and that you are on the road with him.