

Pilgrim United Church of Christ  
New Bedford, MA  
Rev. David M. Hammett, Pastor

April 20, 2008  
Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 7:55-60  
John 14:1-6

### **"Which Way?"**

I have a monthly meeting at a UCC church in Milton. The church is not too difficult to find but it can be a real challenge to find the way back out of town when the meeting is over. The first time I attempted it I missed a turn and it took me an extra 30 minutes to get back home. But I got smart the second time around and borrowed Kay's GPS! The leader of our group gave a lengthy description of how to get back to the Big Road and I listened to her politely and nodded my head appreciatively as she waved her hands around describing the complex trek necessary to navigate Milton's labyrinth of streets. Then I went out to my truck, pushed a button on the GPS unit labeled "home" and it took me there just as nice as you please.

I imagine there are many ways to get from downtown Milton to New Bedford, but I went the best way because I followed a guide that knew the way better than I did.

The reading from the Gospel of John this morning reminds us of that anxious Thursday before Jesus' crucifixion. The setting is the evening of the Last Supper and Judas has already left the group to go to the authorities to make an offer to betray Jesus. Tension fills the room so thick you can cut it with a knife. So unsure, so afraid of what they don't know - you hear it in Thomas' voice: "Lord, we don't know the way, how can we know the way?" But Jesus met their worry with comfort and peace. "Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus said, "for I go to prepare a place for you so that where I am you can also be." Jesus reassured Thomas and the others: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

He knew the best way for them to go in this life and the next. They just needed to trust that he would show them and one day would lead them home.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, in the early days of the faith, before followers of Jesus were called "Christians" they were known as "People of 'The Way'". They were followers of the One who was the way, the truth and the life.

The writer of the Gospel of John's inspiration was that Jesus said no one could come to the Father but through him. Does this mean that Christians have an exclusive truth, that they alone know the right way to God? I think what this means is that Jesus is the gateway for God's grace since his death and resurrection was for all people, for "the sins of the world", that the salvation he offers is for all, even those who don't believe in him. I also think it means he opens to us an understanding of God that is most visible

through him. Jesus opens a window on the divine that shows us God is just and good and loves us unconditionally and that when we trust God more than ourselves, we can reconcile with one another and live in peace and know life's greatest joys. That's a great way to go, the best way to go, the way Jesus shows us.

When the famous theologian Karl Barth was lecturing at Princeton a student asked him, "Sir, don't you think that God has revealed himself in other religions and not only in Christianity?" Barth's response caught people by surprise, "No, God has not revealed himself in any religion, including Christianity. He has revealed himself in his Son."

What we know most clearly about God we know through Jesus. Jesus shows us the Father. Later in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, Jesus says this: "You will know that I am in the Father, and you are in me and I am in you." Jesus connects us with himself and through him, with God.

As we make choices day by day, this connection matters because it helps us make right choices. Seniors about to graduate, people considering marriage, some making job choices, older folks relating to their grandchildren, people in the middle years working through a difficult moment with a spouse – the choices we make, the paths we take, the way we go depends on whom we trust. If all we have is self-focus, trust in ourselves, in our own wit or if all we do is throw ourselves upon the winds of fate, God help us. A lot of the trouble we see in the world is because people do just that. Well ... God can help us, in Jesus Christ. And if we trust him to show us how to love and live and get it right, there's a pretty good chance we will.

I can't speak for all people of all faiths - I just know that for us, this is the right way home, that for Christians, faith is more than seeking a "higher power", achieving Nirvana, following the teachings of Muhammad or keeping Torah. It is about being on The Way, being like Jesus. It is being the Body of Christ, embodying him in the world today, reaching out to all people with grace and goodness and healing and hope, because that's the way Jesus did it, that's the way we know God to be. In so doing we can show them the Father as Christ shows God to us.

As we heard from the book of Acts, Stephen, in the last moments of his life knew the peace of Christ and prayed for God to forgive those who had done him wrong. His heart wasn't troubled for he saw the way home in Jesus.

No matter what we face in joy or struggle, The Way is there before us and Christ beckons us to follow, to know God as he knows God, to know peace, to have hearts that are not troubled, but free.

Lord Jesus, be a lamp unto our feet, show us the way.