

Easter 5  
May 22, 2011

The Exclusive Way

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John 14:1-6

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We live in a world that is very sensitive to being inclusive, diverse and open minded. Work places continue to strive for my diversity, homosexuals are striving for acceptance in society, and globalization is proving that there are often different ways of doing the same things, and one way isn't necessarily better than another way.

This shift in the thinking of the world has also had a strong influence on Christianity. Many churches are going the way of society. The ecumenical movement is one that strives to bring together all Christian denominations. The Unitarian church goes a step further and attempts to unite and bring together every religion on the planet. In the largest Lutheran church body in America, the ELCA, they have made great strides in the last year or so to make sure practicing homosexuals know they are included in their church, and can even be pastors in their congregations. And there is a growing number of people who believe that ultimately, all religions and all personal spiritual paths, ultimately lead to God. No one path is inherently better than any other.

In light of all of this, it might come as a shock to some of you that Jesus himself preached a single, exclusive way to God. One, single, exclusive path that leads to the Father. Now if you're new to our church and you are not a Christian, please don't get up and walk out. Let's hear Jesus out on this one and see what he teaches and why.

It was the night Jesus would be betrayed by Judas. The next morning already he would be hanging on the cross. He's already clued in his disciples that he would only be with them a little longer. Imagine the mix of emotions going through their head that evening. The disciples were troubled. They were troubled because they were **sad**. Sad at the prospect that Jesus was leaving them. Perhaps already thinking about the suffering he had also predicted. They were **ashamed**. Ashamed because on that evening they had showed the selfishness and pride in their heart as they argued about which of them was greatest in the kingdom of God. They were also **perplexed**. Jesus had said one of their own would betray him, and they just couldn't wrap their head around how that could even be possible. Finally, they were **wavering**. Wavering in their faith that he was in fact the Messiah, because this wasn't at all how they pictured things ending up.

To these disciples, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."

### **What is your destination?**

Before you can talk about the way to get somewhere, don't you first have to know where you want to end up? Can you imagine having this conversation with your spouse: "Well, we're leaving on vacation in two hours! Which roads should we take?" And your spouse says, "Well, I really like I80. It's a smooth road and not too much traffic." "East or Westbound?" you ask. "Oh, it's smooth both directions... it really doesn't matter." And you say, "Well, 75 south is a little less traveled, and there's more to look at than there is on the highway. I think that's the road to take." What's wrong with the whole conversation? You haven't decided on your vacation destination yet! Before you ever talk about the way to go, you need to know where you want to end up.

So spiritually speaking, what is our ultimate destination? Where do we eventually want to be? What is our ultimate goal? Thomas, speaking for the disciples said, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Excellent question! Where are we going? How often to stop to think about that vitally important question? You can’t evaluate the path you’re on unless you know exactly where you want to end up. Thomas asked Jesus for some clarification on that matter.

Truth is, we often need that clarification as well. What is our final destination? When all is said and done, where do we want to be? If we don’t stop and give that some thought from time to time, we very well may not end up at our intended destination. We are easily deceived and distracted by worldly goals like wealth, power, authority, popularity, entertainment, and more. We are also easily deceived and distracted by spiritually good things that can turn into a destination instead of a something along the path.

- Some of the spiritual goal or destination point of making a difference in the world. Is that our final destination? It’s a good thing to do on the way, but is it our ultimate goal?
- Some think helping the poor and needy is the final goal. An excellent thing to do along the way? Yes. The final goal? No.
- Some thinking being a better person is their goal and destination. But again, not our goal, but a noble thing to be doing along the way to our real destination... which is, what?

The end goal then? It’s simply this: to be with God our Father for all eternity. We want to end up with God in eternal happiness and joy. And I think we would do well to describe our ultimate destination not as a “where?” but as a “with whom?” With whom do you want to end up? With God!

As the saying goes, “Home is where the heart is.” If your heart is in Jesus and Jesus is in your heart, then your home is wherever Jesus is, isn’t it? Your eternal home is with Jesus. This is your destination! But how easily we are deceived and distracted from that goal. We need to be reminded regularly.

Every year our 7-8<sup>th</sup> grade catechism class goes on a short field trip. We all walk over to the cemetery just on the other side of Burger King: the Bohemian Cemetery. I have them try to find the person who died oldest, youngest, and the person who died closest to their own age. We went on that field trip just last week, and this year, we found the grave of a teenaged girl who was just 13 ½. And to make it even more real, she was just buried the beginning of January. The grave still had straw on it as the grass hasn’t yet grown over it. This was a wake up call to think about what our final destination is. Where do we ultimately want to end up? I’d recommend the same to you. Occasionally take a trip the cemetery and use it as a time to mediate on what your final goal is.

### **What is the path?**

And here’s why: once you have your final destination clearly in mind, now you can seriously talk about the path that will get you there. Your destination is to be with God forever in his presence. Now, how do you get there?

Here is a profound statement that may seem self evident, but isn’t. **Where you end up is not determined by the destination you desire, but by the path you are on.** Where you end up is determined by the path you are on. You may have a destination firmly in mind. You exactly where you want to go. But if you take a wrong turn, the path you’re on will keep you from getting there.

We’ll apply this specifically to our eventual destination of heaven, but understand that this principal is true in every part of your life.

- If the destination you desire is a 25 lb weight loss, but your staying on a path of overeating and little exercise, your path will determine where you end up, not your desire to lose 25 lbs.

- If you desire to pay off your debts ... that's you're intended and desired destination... but on your path, on your way, you continue to spend more than you make, and pay for things with debt instead of cash, your path will determine where you end up... in continued debt.
- If you desire to have a happy marriage (that's your destination you have in mind and you really want to end up there), but you follow a path of not communicating with your spouse, or spending time with your spouse, or making regular deposits into that relationship... if your path doesn't have you unconditionally committed to your spouse no matter what... then your path will determine your destination.

Same is true in spiritual matters. We've got the destination part figured out now. Many say the path is not all that important. Like a mountain peak with multiple paths leading up different sides of the mountain to the one peak, they see religions in the same light. All paths lead to God.

Here's the problem: Jesus himself directly and unequivocally said this is a lie and it's just not true. There is only one path to the final destination, heaven. All other paths lead to a different destination: hell. What is the path that leads to where we want to go? Jesus said it simple: **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."**

Now think about that. Any path that excludes Jesus as the Son of God and the world's Savior is a path that does not reach the desired destination: life with God forever. Now before we get all offended at the exclusivity of this statement, we need to understand why Jesus said it.

God makes the rules about who gets to be blessed in presence for eternity. It's his heaven, so we play by his rules. What does it take to be with him? He doesn't keep it a secret. He writes the answer in our consciences and in Scriptures. Our conscience tell us, "Be good! Do good! Think good! Your speech? Also be good!" And God's word says it like this: "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." God is holy, good and perfect, you be holy good and perfect.

The problem? We're not as he requires. We don't measure up. We fall short. At his gates he rejects us as unsuitable for life with him.

The solution? Try to do better than you're doing now? Not enough. Do more good than bad? Doesn't remove the bad! Do better than those around you and hope God grades on a curve? He doesn't. God's requirement: Be perfect, or go away. From him. Forever.

But God in his love found a WAY. He reveals to us a new TRUTH. He delivers what we we lack: LIFE. It is Jesus. The Son of God, perfect and holy, fully met his Father's requirements. But he did not keep this glory for himself. He gives it to us by removing what we can't have: disobedience; and by giving what we must have: perfection. In this way, Jesus provides the way, the path to eternal life with God in heaven. It's the only way to reach this destination! He speaks the truth about this. He's the only source of life for eternity.

Jesus Christ is the one and only path to heaven and the heavenly Father. This path is exclusive. There is no other way. Yet know this: This one way is offered to every single person on the planet. Every single person in the world, no matter who you are, what you've done, this way through Jesus is open to you.

Dear friends, do not let your hearts be troubled. Clear you minds and see the destination that your heart desires: Life forever with God. Then understand this: whatever path we might find or try is a dead end. The only way to this destination is provided by God through his Son Jesus Christ. Listen and take to heart the words of Jesus: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Amen.