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May

You Know the Way

Stories That Matter

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A

Jesus declares, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” This service invites us to unite belief with holy living, exploring how faith shapes our daily choices and communal witness.

REFERENCES

Proverbs 4:10-18

Psalm 119:9-20

1 Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

COLORS

White

If you’ve been planning worship using the Revised Common Lectionary for a while, you’ve probably noticed that the first few Sundays after Easter usually focus on post-Resurrection appearances. However, as we enter the later weeks of Eastertide, our Gospel readings revisit Jesus’ pre-Resurrection teachings, which elaborate on his salvific work. That is why our reading this week features Thomas again (or, rather, for the first time) questioning Jesus’ words. I sometimes imagine Thomas as a six-year-old, sitting in front of his teacher who says, “And you know the way to the place where I am going,” and immediately shooting his hand in the air while interjecting, “Nuh-uh! I don’t know! How can we know the way?” It might be tempting to good-naturedly roll our eyes at Thomas’s outburst, but in this story and in John 20, Thomas serves as a stand-in for us. Thomas asks the questions (or, later, expresses the doubts) that we hold in our hearts, speaking what we might not be ready to utter.

Thankfully, Jesus gives Thomas (and us) an answer: I am the way, the truth, and the life. Follow Jesus, and we'll know the way to the place where Jesus is going. Great. Now, how do we do that? I think it is interesting that Jesus doesn't just answer that he is the way—he adds truth and life. It is as if to say, “I am the way, and to follow the way, you have to both believe the truth of who I am and live the way I show you to live.” Charles Wesley picked up on this interplay of belief and ethics when he wrote in a hymn for children, “Unite the pair so long disjointed,/Knowledge and vital piety.” (Follow the link to find the hymn set to the tune ST. CATHERINE. It would make an excellent opening hymn!)

So, consider how you will unite belief with holy living in worship. If you regularly recite the Apostles' Creed or another statement of faith, take a moment before speaking it together or after, perhaps even in the sermon, to highlight how the beliefs we proclaim in the creed guide the way we live. As you pray for the community, draw connections between our trust in God's faithfulness and our call to love and serve our neighbors, to live the answers to the prayers we pray because of God's steadfast love. Also, create space for the community to raise their questions, to embody Thomas in response to the scripture reading. What is the way? How do I know the truth? What does life in God look like? This might involve offering a litany of questions woven with a prayer response, or having a time of silent prayer for congregants to offer up their questions and listen for God's voice, or inviting people to speak their questions out loud during the sermon. As we discussed a few weeks ago, Thomas is not wrong for asking questions. We learn to follow the Way when we bring our questions into the open, trust God to hold them, and seek after the truth and life God gives together.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God's Children.

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