I don't have a great sense of direction and I'm pretty crummy at reading maps, especially if I'm driving at the same time. I have a way of holding maps that makes perfect sense to me but tends to make other people laugh at me. To me, whatever direction I'm driving is north, so whenever I make a turn, I turn the map that way also. This has resulted in some mistakes in written or verbal instructions, more than I would probably ever admit. This is why I'm so happy Mapquest and GPS were invented. I love telling Mapquest exactly where I want to go, what kind of roads I want to use (like blue-line roads instead of interstate) and then printing out a personalized map with written directions. Even better is using the navigation system on my phone, especially when I activate the voice directions and a calm voice tells me in advance where my turns are going to be. To be honest, I still get lost occasionally but that's OK because now I get to blame it on the GPS.

If only the rest of life were so simple! Wouldn't it be great if we could call up Mapquest or the GPS on our phones, enter a few bits of information and receive explicit directions? Where do I go to find happiness? When should I make a career move and would you mind telling me how to go about it? Which way do I turn when my loved one gets sick? Where's the road to retirement and how far ahead is it? Life truly would be easier if we knew ahead of time where we want to go and exactly how to get there!

I'll bet the disciples felt that way also. After they shared their last meal with Jesus, his followers remained at the table, listening to Jesus talk about what was going to happen to him. It slowly began to dawn on the disciples that Jesus was talking about leaving them. They began to get that panicky feeling children get when their parents are out of sight. Simon Peter was the first to speak. “Lord, where are you going and why can't I follow you?” Imagine how Peter felt when Jesus told him he would deny knowing Jesus before the night was over, and not just once, but three times.

The disciples were worried. For the past three years, Jesus had kept his disciples close and had led them down a unpredictable yet thrilling road as he taught them what it meant to be his followers. If Jesus left them now, who would tell them what came next? How would they know where to go, where to turn, what to do with the rest of their lives? The cryptic way Jesus was speaking to them wasn't helping. He was going to prepare a place for them and then they would know the way? That didn't make sense. The disciples operated best with clear, concise directions. They wanted Jesus to take them by the hand and point out what was going to happen to them next. Thomas voiced the disciples' frustration. “Lord, we don't know where you are going. How are we supposed to know the way?”

If we are honest, it's the question every Christian asks many times in a lifetime. Though none of us are handed a GPS with all the directions spelled out, Jesus does answer us. He says, “I am the way. I'm the truth. And I'm the life. No one reaches the Father except through me, but through me, everyone reaches the Father.” In the days to follow this mysterious declaration, Jesus would live it out. He would be tortured, would die and be raised from the dead. Through him, all who died would be lifted up to new life. They would enter a paradise with many places, but only one prepared with great love just for them.

But Jesus' words aren't just about when his followers leave this world. The way to the fullest possible relationship with God comes through the one with whom Jesus has the fullest possible relationship. Jesus is the way to resurrection life, not just in the world to come but right here, right now. “I am the way.” Jesus is no bystander who points out directions to lost travelers. Jesus is the road on which we all travel. “Follow me,” he says, “I've been this way before you and I will go with you to make sure you don't get lost.” One of the great words used in the Bible to describe Jesus is “prodromos.” The word comes from the Hebrew and is translated into English as “forerunner.” Centuries ago, the harbor of Alexandria in Egypt was very difficult to approach. When the great corn ships came into it, a small pilot boat was sent out to guide each one in. It went in front of a ship and the ship would follow as it lead them along the tricky channel into safe harbor. That pilot boat was called the prodromos. It went first to make it safe for others to follow. This is what Jesus did and does. He makes a path to God so that we may follow in his wake. When we look at where he is going, we discover that is the way we must go, too.

One of my favorite books is a slim volume entitled, “Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life.” The title comes from a World War II practice. When orphaned and displaced children arrived in orphanages and other gathering places where they stayed until the war's end, they were often traumatized by sorrow, by a sense of loss and by very real hunger. Many of them could not remember their last meal and did not know when they would eat again. This uncertainty created a lot of anxiety for the children and those who cared for them found they slept better when they were given a loaf of bread which they could hold through the night. That loaf of bread literally gave the chidlren hope. The book offers a way for adults and families to reflect on the meaning or lack of it in their lives and, I believe, helps us figure out where Jesus would have us go in life. The practice is quite simple. At the end a day, each person considers two questions: “For what moment today am I most grateful?” and “For what moment today am I least grateful?” There are other ways to ask the same question. “When did I feel most alive today? When did I feel life draining out of me? When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging and when did I have the least? When did I give and receive the most love today? When did I give and receive the least love?” The whole purpose of this practice, called the *examen*, is to pay attention to those moments that ultimately can give our lives direction, meaning and hope. The authors' overriding point is that is that God's will for us is to do more of whatever gives us the most life or gratitude and to focus on what enables us to give and receive love.

God wants to give us more life and more love. That is why God raised Jesus from the dead, so we might have resurrection life. “I am the way and the truth and the life.” That is Jesus' message to all his disciples. I don't think God will ever give us a Mapquest site or a personal GPS that tells us every single move to make every single day. Jesus does promise to be with us wherever we go, whether it's a clearly marked road, one we should have taken a detour around or a complete dead end. The good news is that we don't have to figure out our final destination. That has already been reached for us by Jesus, who promises he has prepared a place for us. What's left for us to discover what gives us life and hope.

I truly believe that together we can find those things and then will be able to offer others what and who they need to have life and to have it abundantly.

Amen.

*Easter 5A*

*May 14, 2017*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

*John 14:1-12*