Sometimes it’s helpful to know where a preacher is going. I believe this sermon is a consideration of the difference between the questions, “Is Jesus the way?” and “Is this the Jesus’ way?”

A parable is told of a man from the city who wanted to retreat in the country. He got to the village and was met by a sage who said, “You want to retreat in our village, let me tell you how it works. Take your lawn chair on the deck by the river. Set it facing downstream and let the river empty you. Then when it is time, turn the lawn chair to face upstream and let the river fill you. Only this, when you want to turn the lawn chair it will not yet be time.

Lent is a season of letting the river empty us. The Gospel this morning begins with our hearts being emptied of their troubles. What a good idea in the middle of midterm week. Let the river Jesus take your troubles, all o them. Believe in God. . . and believe that God is bigger than troubles. What do I mean by emptying? It could mean to admit you can’t change something or it could mean accept or it could mean be open to discover something you haven’t even thought of. If you hope the retreat called spring break will empty you of troubles, let the Gospel this morning help you get started.

In My Father’s House are many dwelling places. Our rooms, of course, are jammed and so our are our lives. Lent is a kind of spring house cleaning that would declutter, make space, keep only that which is needful. . . or maybe lighten your grip even on that. The promise of scripture is always that God’s mercy is wider than we imagine, but our quarters get cramped. Let the River Jesus empty us of anything that would restrict grace, lock our doors in fear, or think for a moment that there is not enough room for you, for your neighbors. God loves all of creation—how can we think there’s no room? Let the river Jesus open our doors and windows to let in both love and the promise of love, the discovery of loveability. Emptying is room for other people, grace for other people. You set that lawn chair by the
river and let Jesus take your troubles, and your cramped vision, your furrowed brow. Let the river make space for grace.

Jesus promises to come and take us to himself. Thomas asks the million dollar question, “How can we know the way?” Trying to figure out your life, trying to discern the next step, trying to know where God is calling you? Tired of people asking you where you are going? Here’s a stall: Next time someone asks you where you’re going, just smile and say you learned in chapel that that’s the same question Thomas asks in John 14:5. Not knowing is biblical!

More importantly John 14, Lent say, “Let the River take your questions.” The book, You Lost Me, is a consideration of the Barna research on why so many young adults are leaving church. It lists in the top 6 reasons that there is not enough room for doubt or questions. The perception troubles me. The Bible is full of questions. A friend of mine of is doing a Lenten series on the questions of Jesus. He listed all the questions Jesus asks in the Gospels—it is like 5 pages long. Faith not only receives your questions, it gives you questions. The church needs your questions and if you’re going to ask them fearlessly you need a community around you.

If we’re to believe at all that God in this Gospel takes our troubles, then let’s be clear. Set your lawn chair facing downstream and let the river take your questions. Jesus can handle them and so can the church. Will you not be more free? Will grace not be more spacious, if you let the questions roll out on the water? Will we not be more together when we know the questions we have? How else will we know the way?

The most intense question I have with this Gospel is if v. 6 is suddenly the time to turn the lawn chair, to move from all this opening, freeing, questioning dialog to the certainty of an answer. When Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Is he filling us with knowing or is he calling us to a deeper emptying? Do we now have a litmus test by which we can judge the rest of the world, who’s in
or who’s out? OR are we set beside a river of righteousness that calls us to a deeper trust and a wider love than we can yet imagine?

Eugene Peterson says we must do the Jesus truth in the Jesus way. . . .Jesus is the one who says the Gentiles lord it over you, but I came to serve. Jesus redefines Messiah—everyone expects a messiah to come with force, with royal power, to whip things into shape. Jesus subverts every power except the power of love, wholehearted, emptying, trusting love. We must do the Jesus’ truth in the Jesus’ way.

When Jesus says no one comes to the Father but by me, do you think he means no one comes without having the right answer or no one comes without being called out of themselves, their own insistence on their own way, their own limited and often fear provoked power. I am very troubled become a barrier, and I often hear them quoted as barriers. When what begins as a promise of freedom from troubles, and moves to a spacious mansion with a place for each and all of us, and continues in a free and challenging discussion of questions between friends, when what through and through promises to be a way. . . becomes a barrier.

There is a difference between the question, “Is Jesus the way?” and “Is this the Jesus’ way?”

When I hear John promising Jesus as the way, I hear him promising that as he has from the beginning Jesus will make a way where there is no way, where we can find no way. We do not know the future. None of us know what is ahead—the way into the future is not merely a question of young adults. The way of Jesus is the promise of trust that give us the courage to venture into the unknown. We cannot make our way alone. . . Jesus is fully the promise that we are not alone.

We cannot make a way through our own failures and errors. There are lots of stories being told this week about Pastor LeRoy Iseminger, a legendary South Dakota pastor. For a time Pastor Iseminger served St. Dysmas, the congregation at the state penitentiary. One Christmas eve he went around cell to
cell to greet and pray with the men. He told the story of one man who said, “I only need 90 seconds of my life back. My whole life would be different. . . “ Of course, he cannot go back. We cannot go back, we cannot undo, The power of letting the river empty us, is that the truth carries the burden on the promise of a God who is merciful and who comes to make a way. And finally a central focus of Lent: we cannot make a way through death. . . Jesus does not merely tell us to face up to it, Jesus faces it with us and for us and frees us to live through it. To live freely, as servants of life, in the face of it.

Let the river empty you. . . of frenzied efforts to somehow believe you can control or predict or manage or get there—wherever there is. And let it help you believe that God will make a way. . . it will be disarmingly truthful, and in the Jesus’ way it will be served with quiet trust.

And then when it is time, turn that old lawn chair and let the river fill you. It does not anywhere promise you more stuff. We don’t need more stuff. I wouldn’t even say more power—certainly not more power as we usually think of it. Rather it is a connection to a totally different kind of power. It promises you more light to see the gifts of God—in and around you, even and especially in the broken places. And more trust that pulled out of self, trusting Jesus’ mercy for the hardest truths, and the call to be given in sharing this love is to know the very heart of God.
HOLY COMMUNION
Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Prelude \textit{“Fanfare for the Eternal”} Earl Sherburn

Invocation

Confession \textit{ELW p. 321}

Prayer \textit{ELW p. 87}

\textbf{ALL:} Lord God, you call us your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the endings, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn \textit{“Be Thou My Vision”} \textit{ELW} #793

Scripture

Sermon \textit{The Way of Jesus} Pastor Paul

Hymn \textit{“If You but Trust in God to Guide You”} \textit{ELW} #769 vv. 1, 4

Holy Communion

\textit{“Prayer and Alleluia”} Anton Bruckner, arr. Marlatt

\textit{“The Lord is My Shepherd”} James Montgomery, arr. Carmichael

Benediction

Postlude \textit{“Little Fugue in G”} J.S. Bach, arr. Marlatt

\textbf{Brass Choir}

Paul Schilf, Dir.

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

\textbf{WEEKLY LENTEN SERVICE} - Holden Evening Prayer, 5:05 pm

\textbf{“COMMON GROUND” - THURSDAY EVENING WORSHIP} - 7:30 pm every week in the chapel

\textbf{“FOOD TO YOU” -} Campus Ministry is sponsoring an evening at the "Food to You" mobile food pantry on \textbf{Tues., Apr. 3rd}. FTY is administered by a consortium of Lutheran churches and serves hundreds of Sioux Falls families. It is a very important ministry to neighbors who are in need. \textbf{There are several ways that you can contribute to this effort:}

1. \textbf{The food donation of the month is \textit{cereal} (150-200 of any kind....boxes or bags)} T.P. is also collected to hand out in hygiene packets.

2. \textbf{Monetary contributions (we are responsible for $250-300 to cover the expense of the food handling costs from the SD Food Bank, as well as the cost of the fresh products purchases from area grocery stores)}

3. \textbf{Volunteer from 5:10-8:00 pm on Apr. 3rd. (we need 18-22 volunteers)}

\textbf{If you would like to help, please bring your cereal items or monetary contributions to the chapel after Spring Break. Let us know if you would like to help at the distribution site.}

\textbf{SUNDAY NIGHT MASS} - Fr. Kevin O’Dell will be saying Mass every Sunday night in the chapel at 8 pm. when school is in session. When there is a break, there will be Mass on the Sunday night when students return to campus. Confessions are offered before Mass.

\textbf{CHAPEL SCHEDULE}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
Wed., Mar. 14th & Lenten Service, 5:05 pm - Holden Evening Pr. \\
Thurs., Mar. 15th & \textit{“Common Ground”} evening worship, 7:30 pm \\
Fri., Mar. 16th & Morning worship, 10 am - Glynnis Kunkel, Sr. Spk. \\
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\textbf{SPRING BREAK - no chapel services}
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