

## **Hope for a Promising Future**

### **John 14:1-7 (ESV)**

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

JESUS IS THE WAY TO, THE TRUTH OF, AND THE LIFE FOR A PROMISING FUTURE.

### **Introduction**

Graduates of 2004, parents, family and friends, educators, and the assembly of saints gathered here, grace and peace are yours from our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). I want to thank you all for the chance to come and share this moment –*your* moment – with you all tonight. I’ve had three graduations myself since high school, but this is the first time I’ve been on this side speaking, instead of sitting with you and listening!

I believe the text we just heard read from the Gospel of St. John is perfect for a time like this. Jesus is actually giving his address to his own graduating class of disciples, 2,000 years ago. The scene is the Last Supper, “the night in which he was betrayed.” No doubt the disciples had their own precious memories of Christ’s time with them: relaxing together on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the miraculous healings, the crowds excited to hear their teacher. What concerned Jesus right now, though, was whether what he had taught these fishermen and tax collectors had become nothing but “precious memories.” I’m sure your teachers wonder the same thing – will you remember what they’ve taught as you move on into the future?

Jesus tells the disciples he’s leaving them, but not just with memories. He’s going to prepare a promising future for them – and a promising future for us. He’s going to prepare a place for his disciples, a place in his Father’s house. One day, the disciples will follow to be with the Lord in that house forever. But apparently the disciples didn’t remember much of Christ’s teachings, after all. Thomas is the one who asks, “Lord, we don’t get it. The dog ate my homework, I got sick last night and I didn’t have time to study. How exactly do we follow where you’re going?” So Jesus sighs, and says, “Thomas – have you been learning from me for three years and you still don’t know what I’m talking about? Follow ME! I AM the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE.” If you’re looking for a truly promising future, Christ is the only ticket there.

### **I. Jesus is the Way to a Promising Future**

My last graduation ceremony was actually only a year ago, from seminary in Indiana. Like most of you, I hope, I made some friends in school. We promised to stay in touch once we went our separate ways across the United States. To do that, we set up an email group, and gave ourselves a Greek name, which translates as “In the Way.” The very first Christians called themselves “followers of the Way,” and so we thought that was appropriate. But we were also thinking of Jesus’ words at his disciples’ graduation – that he is *the* Way.

Graduates, you are moving on – some to more school, some to work, some to bug your parents at home while you figure out what to do with the rest of your life. One way or another, though, you

too will be in the way. You will be in the way of the world. You can think of that in two ways. In one sense, you can be in “the way of the world.” You can look for a promising future in this 21<sup>st</sup> century world, and make the best of the 70 years or so you probably have left on it. You can buy into all those things you will be told are important – Safe Auto Insurance, a mortgage from Ditech, a Hummer, cruises on the Princess Line or a vacation at Sandals Resort every winter. You can get a good job; try to be a good wife or husband or father or mother. Be a productive member “of” the world. That’s fine as far as it goes.

But there’s another way to think of being “in the way.” And that’s being “in the way” of the world. That’s the hope Jesus has for your future. A future that will outlast the mere 70 or so years, God willing, you may have left of this particular life. Christ calls to you to follow him to a promising future beyond your wildest imaginations, to live a life that stands “in the way” of the world’s values, like a rolled-over tank in the middle of I-95, stopping traffic, annoying people, getting honked at, and lovin’ every minute of it! Because when we follow Christ, that’s what we become – a giant roadblock to what the world thinks is important, maybe even what your own family and community thinks is important. Jesus stood in the way of his world and its values – and he invites you to be part of his promising future by doing the same.

## **II. Jesus is the Truth of a Promising Future**

When Christ places us “in the way” of the world, he also calls us to see him as the Truth. Not a truth, or part of the truth, but the “capital T” Truth. I hope most of you got a chance to see Gibson’s movie the Passion. For me the most moving scenes were Christ’s confrontations with Pilate, especially when Jesus says, “I have come to bear witness to the truth,” eliciting Pilate’s famous reply, “What is truth?” Jesus’ answer is telling. He just stands there. He stands, and stands *there*, because he IS the Truth.

Christianity is all about truth. Not some vague, “true for me, true for you,” “everything’s true, so nothing’s true” kind of truth. Christ’s Truth is the kind of Truth that stands there, in your way, making its claim without compromise. It’s the kind of truth that will put you “in the way” of the world, sometimes even with each other. Pick up any paper and you’ll see what I mean. Like we Missouri Synod Lutherans, the bishops of the Catholic Church are taking a firm stand on the question of abortion. For us Christ’s command to let the children come to him and not hinder them cannot be fudged or ignored. It is part of Christ’s Truth, and the world, like Pilate, cannot bear to hear it. Yet I know there are many Christians who don’t agree with that position – maybe many of you who are here. Even on the most basic beliefs we Christians are divided, like the teaching of our Lord that only through him and the saving work of his cross do we have a hope for an eternal future life. Even though we all call ourselves Christians, we can’t overlook these obvious and significant differences, if we claim that Jesus is the Capital T Truth.

But these divisions don’t excuse or do away with the fact that Christ still claims to be the one and only Truth. All of us will be responsible to the Father for what we have believed and taught others about his Son. I have been convinced by Scripture and plain reason that what I believe, teach and confess as a Lutheran is Christ’s perfect Truth. The Lord calls you, too, to seek after his truth, and not just believe unquestioningly what everybody else is trying to teach you. After all, if everyone told you to jump off a cliff, would you do it too? Seek after the one who is the way, and the one who is the truth, and work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Eph. 2:12). Don’t be a Pilate who just throws his hands in the air and says, “Gosh, I can’t be bothered to find the Truth – so I’ll just kill the Truth and get on with my life.”

## **III. Jesus is the Life for a Promising Future**

The Truth about the Way of Christ is that he promises us Life. He came that we might have an abundant life in him, a life that will not end at our death. When the Son of God took flesh and died for us, he did it to open the gates of heaven. Your high school GPA may open doors to college, and your college GPA may open doors to a good job, and a good job may open the doors of a great big house in Radnor. But only faith in Jesus Christ as Lord can open the doors to the Father's house. The kind of life Christ wants for all of us is a life that will live on beyond the 70 years assigned to us here. It's the kind of life that will end in a resurrection from the dead and a new life in the heavenly Jerusalem.

It's an old joke, but it bears repeating. The one who dies with the most toys – still dies. Don't fuel your life on precious memories alone, but be driven to a Christ-filled future. As a Lutheran, I would urge you to remember your baptism – where you died with Christ and to all the emptiness of a hopeless and empty future, and where God saved you and gave you the promise of an eternal future in the world to come (Rom. 6:4).

### **Conclusion**

At the end of Jesus' baccalaureate address, there wasn't much of a party. The graduation ceremony was delayed three days due to death. I know your party will be a little more upbeat. It should be – this is a great milestone in your life, a time to think back on your hard work, the training you've received, the good times and bad times, the fun and the laughter.

Christ will also be part of that celebration – because there's no one with a more vested interest in your life. There's no one who cares more about where you are now and what will happen to you in the future. Christ alone is your biggest fan club, your biggest cheering section, the one who will always be ready with his gift of forgiveness when you think all hope is lost. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life..

That's the Lord's plan for all of you, to prosper you and give you a future. He will be found by you, and bring you to a new land where death will be no more. Believe in God, believe in his Son, and your precious memories will live on for eternity in the Lord's promising future.