

Sermon – John 14:1-14; 1 Peter 2:2-10

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5 Easter – Year A

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“Building Blocks”

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

1. I was not allowed, of course, to drive the Lyle minivan when I was ten years old. I couldn't reach the pedals, and my parents would have been locked up for letting me try. Nevertheless, I'm sure I could have driven to either of my grandmothers' homes without using a map by the time I was ten. They didn't live far apart from one another. Grandma Lyle had moved into a Madison condo when she retired; Grandma Nyhus still lived on the land she and Grandpa had farmed for years. I couldn't have told you the names of the roads, but I knew how the highway wound south, slowing down for the speed trap in Rosendale, then past the many American-flagged silos. We had to travel over butterfly road, which my brother and I had named for the effect this hilly section had on our stomachs, our way pointed by the bright murals painted on barns. Then, either past Lakes Monona and Mendota to see Grandma Lyle, Millie, or down slow country lanes to visit Grandma Nyhus, Connie. When I was ten, I could have navigated from my driveway to theirs, no problem. Of course, the years have rolled by and, while I now have a driver's license, I couldn't find them if I tried. I was blessed to have both of my grandmothers live until I was in my twenties, but they've been gone for twenty years. Millie was lost to dementia at the end of her life; hers was the first graveside service at which I presided as a not-yet-ordained seminarian just trying not to weep. Connie died, perfectly healthy, of a broken heart not long after her beloved Clifford succumbed to Parkinson's. On this Mother's Day, I think of my mom with gratitude. But I also think of my two

- grandmothers, Millie and Connie, who in very different ways helped me become the person I am today. I'd love to see them but, of course, I can't. They've gone ahead on a road that I cannot yet travel.
2. How is the gap bridged between us and those who have died? What will bridge our death back to life? These thoughts were on the minds of the disciples the night before Jesus was going to die. His whole ministry had been driving in this direction, a cruciform road map pointing to Calvary. Having broken bread and washed feet, Jesus now speaks to them: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you. You know the way to the place where I am going." To paraphrase Thomas in response: "Umm, what?" Moving from life to death is the easiest thing in the world. Every person ever *has* done it or *will* do it soon enough. But moving from death to life? Well, that's another thing entirely.
 3. Yet Jesus speaks here with confidence, faith. Where are you going Jesus? "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Listen to what he's saying. First, the "I am" statement, a surefire declaration of his own divinity. This carpenter's boy from Nazareth is also Yahweh, the Word who spoke from a burning bush. And who is I am? Not One who knows the way; One who *is* the way. As Jesus stares down the death he knows is waiting for him on the morrow, he speaks of a new road under construction, levelling mountains and lifting valleys, into the tomb and on toward daybreak. Jesus in dying will carve a new path through the wilderness of sin and death, leading back to the life that was him all along. You want to find me, Jesus says? Your loved ones? Yourself? Follow me. Into death. Into life. Back home to the Father of us all.
 4. We know this, friends. We know it but we can't see it. Because we can't see it, we are anxious, worried. Fearful, grieving. This is always true, but the coronavirus pandemic heightens everything. Uncertainty rages about when and how to reopen. Racial and economic disparities are exacerbated. Doubt

plagues us as to what the “normal” is to which we will return when we return to normal. We want to see the roadmap, know the names of the highways. We want to *see*. Thomas is assuaged by Jesus’ promise. But not Philip. Philip wants more. “Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Ha. All we need, Jesus, is to see God. Can you manage that? Isn’t that what we all want? To see God; to know the plan; to have a perfectly legible atlas spread across the dashboard to get us where we need to go? Amazingly, Jesus says neither, “Sure, here you go” nor “You’ll just have to wait.” Jesus, the I am, tells Philip – tells us – *look at me*. See what I’ve done, yes, but even more, see what I’m about to do. I, the I am, the creative Word stirring creation out of nothing, I am about to die. For you. Because of your sin and your death, but also to save you from your sin and your death. You want to see God? Look at me tomorrow, nailed to a tree, and see. See me glorified, for there is no greater glory than loving self-sacrifice. They will reject me, throw the stone of my life on this broken world’s slagheap. But that will not be the end of the story. My death, Jesus proclaims, will become the road to life. Not just for Jesus. For you, and for me. All we need to do is follow him to where we were going any way. Where Connie and Millie and all the saints have already gone. To death. Our lives wind down so many different roads, but we all end up at the same place. So that’s where Jesus meets us. In death, we are shown the way into life – a life more than we’ve ever known. Life in the home of the God who has chosen to live with us.

5. We cannot yet see the way unto eternal life, but no matter. We know the way. His name is Jesus and he knows where he’s going. We can trust him, for he is the truth. Given the promise of life with Christ forever, our task is to turn our attention back to this world, to God’s creative task of building a new creation upon the cornerstone that was rejected. God is building us up as a royal priesthood, and holy nation. We are church, community, together in Christ for the sake of the world. Our call is to become the answer to Philip’s question, to manifest the grace and the glory of God in this world by living for

the sake of life in the face of death. We entrust the blessed saints to God's unfailing care, and we live for the sake of the living. We partner with Housing Forward and Harmony Food Pantry and so many others, working together as building blocks for the sake of the kingdom. As we do so, we make visible the Body of Christ in the world.

6. These are anxious times, friends, but do not let your hearts be troubled. Christ was put to death, tossed aside. Yet God raised him up to be the cornerstone of a new creation in which there is room enough for all. You are a beloved building block in the new world God is making, just like those saints who have travelled this road before us. Keep the faith as we journey on the way, for Jesus has brought us out of death and into life. One day we will see God face to face, with joy and peace unending. Until then, we look to the cross, seeing in wonder what God was willing to do to be with us. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.

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