

Sermon from May 10:

## Jesus Is the Way

If a lion and a tiger were on the same path, approaching each other in the jungle, which would step aside to avoid defeat? In Rudyard Kipling's classic novel of 1894, *The Jungle Book*, such a debate takes place between Mowgli, the man cub raised by wolves, and all the other animals.

They are discussing what is most feared in the jungle. The wise old owl gives the best answer. He says what is most feared in the jungle is death, because when death is on the path, it moves for no one. It seems true, that all animals in this world, humans too, fear death, and one day must step aside for it.

So, what happened when Jesus and death were face-to-face on that path? Who stepped aside for who? Did death somehow run over Jesus, or cause him to step aside? Or did Jesus cause death to step aside, forcing it to yield to him, because he was the Son of God, because he was divine.

In the Gospel reading today, we have what biblical scholars call the Farewell Discourse. Jesus, in chapters 14, 15, and 16 of the Gospel of John, prepares his followers for his leaving, for his death. Jesus will be face-to-face with death on the cross, and he wants his followers to be ready when this happens.

In the Farewell Discourse, Jesus tells his followers, and this includes us too, that he is not afraid of death. Sure, he will be face-to-face with it. Sure, he will die, and for a time lay dead in a tomb. But even so, he is not afraid of death, nor will he ever step aside for it. Instead, he conquers it.

This is the discovery the followers of Jesus make on Easter, that death stepped aside for the risen Jesus. Even though Jesus died on the cross, death was the loser, and the risen Jesus was the conqueror. Jesus caused death to step aside, and to bow to him. As the Son of God, Jesus was stronger than death.

So, my friends in Christ, we see that Jesus is the Way to defeat death. We see that Jesus is the Way to pass through death into a heavenly future. Jesus is so confident of this, that he gives us and all his followers, a wonderful picture of our future in John 14, verses we often use at funerals.

Jesus starts the passage comforting us with the words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Of course, Jesus knows that death does trouble us, that it makes us sad and causes us to fear. So, he tells us that because he is not afraid of death, because he is the Way to defeat death, we don't have to be afraid of it either.

I remember my mom comforting me in a similar way. I was not facing death that day, but I was very hurt. I was a young boy riding my bike, chasing butterflies for my collection, and not paying attention to the road. So, I smashed into the back of a parked truck, ripping open my chin, and my blood was everywhere.

I was less than a block from home, so my mom came running for me, covering my wound with a towel, comforting me by saying that everything was going to be OK. Similarly, when I was faced with stitches in the emergency room, she again comforted me, telling me not to fear. She would not leave my side.

Such comforting does work, when it comes from someone who loves us, like our moms, or like Jesus. Indeed, Jesus loves us, and tells us not to fear death, because he is the Way through it. He tells us to trust him, and he will be with us, to lead us through dying and death, to a bright and wonderful future with God.

So, to comfort us, Jesus tells us he going to prepare a place for us in God's house. This house, of course, is heaven, and when our place is ready, when we are face-to-face with death on the path

of life, then Jesus says he will come to rescue us. Then he will come to take us to our heavenly place.

This means that when we are face-to-face with death, we need not fear it, we need not to step aside for it, because with the risen Jesus alongside of us, he will lead us through it. Death will step aside for us too, because it must step aside for the Lord Jesus Christ, who has conquered it forever.

Now the words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," make perfect sense. It's not that we don't come face-to-face with death, but when we do, we have the comforting presence of Jesus alongside us. Jesus comes to us as the Way through death, so we may travel with the Lord to our place in heaven.

But Jesus is not only the Way through death. He is also the Way through your life. In the Gospel reading today, Jesus says, "If in my name, you ask me for anything, I will do it." Certainly, these words can be problematic, if you ask Jesus for a pepperoni pizza, or for healing from irreversibly terminal cancer.

The truth is, it's not an option for us to avoid face-to-face contact with death, and with many other such troubles in this mortal world. But what is an option, is that you ask Jesus to be at your side in amidst every circumstance in life. Jesus is willing, so very willing, to be alongside you, and to help you with everything.

What Jesus is saying in these words, is if you need help in this time of the coronavirus pandemic, he will give it. Jesus will help you because he is the Way through these challenging days, and through every hard circumstance in life. There is not anything the risen Lord Jesus will not help us with as we go through life.

So, ask him to be with you, and he will be with you. Ask him to help you, and he will help you. If you are troubled or sad, grieving or hurt, sick or suffering, or in need of guidance, ask Jesus, by name, to help you, and Jesus says, "I will do it!" Jesus says when you are face-to-face with any hardship, he will be at your side.

The first pet Margo and I had, was our black cat Kirby. I used to like to have staring contests with him. Unlike some cats, Kirby would fix his eyes on my eyes and stare at me. I liked to see if he would blink before I blinked. Truth be told, if Kirby was not distracted to look away, he would always win.

Well, on the cross, Jesus and death had a staring contest. Who would blink first? While it seems that Jesus lost, that he blinked when he died Good Friday, there is a deeper reality. The truth is that on Easter, the day of Jesus' resurrection, we discover death blinked first. Death lost, and Jesus, he won.

So, do not let your hearts be troubled. But with great confidence, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who did not blink, flinch, or step aside when face-to-face with death. Instead, he has conquered death for himself and for us. Furthermore, he has conquered sin, evil and every other life challenge, for himself, and for us.

That means, whatever challenge you face, even this virus, do not be afraid. Jesus is the Way through this. Jesus will save you and keep you safe. So, whether you are sick or dying, struggling personally or in your marriage, or having trouble make ends meet financially, Jesus is the Way through such things.

Indeed, Jesus will not blink or step aside for anything that tries to harm you, even death. In fact, Jesus loves you so very much, he will not let you face any such challenges by yourself. He is with you always, meaning one day, when you face death, he will take you home to a place prepared especially for you. Amen.