

## **“This is the Way”**

### **John 14:1-14**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Most of you have probably at least heard of the popular Star Wars TV show, “The Mandalorian,” and in that show, there is a group of people that live every day according to a code. When they abide by that code, in spite of the potential other options that are available, they all respond in kind, “This is the way.” Now, before anyone gets any ideas and thinks I’m telling you to follow the ideals of an imaginary Star Wars race, the point here is that despite what happens in the world around them, they adhere to “the way” of their people. In our Gospel lesson this morning, the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, identifies Himself as “the Way.” Much like the Mandalorian people, no matter the circumstance of the world around you, which is deteriorating every single day, you seek to follow “the Way,” and that “Way” is Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior. Surrounded by a world full of darkness, sin, and evil, it is so important that you understand the clear direction to follow the light of “The Way.” You must begin with a focus on the way of death and move through this progression to the way of life, and how your faith is maintained on the way.

All of you were born into this life in the way of death. Corrupted by the scourge of original sin, your Old Adam came screaming into this world, ready to take the reins and lead you through life. Psalm 51:5 says, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” The way of death is the way of sin, and the way of sin leads to eternal judgment from the Almighty God. And God, knowing the sin you would be born into, started you on the way of life by granting you faith through the Holy Spirit in your baptisms. And so, you have progressed from the way of death to the way of life. Just as the way of death is the way of sin, the way of life is the way of redemption, of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who is Himself the Way of life. Having embarked on this way of life by God’s grace, you must continually be strengthened in your faith; kept on the road, so to speak, so that by faith alone you might reach the end destination of eternal life with Christ.

Much like the characters in the Mandalorian, you, too, have your own code that you follow to aid in keeping you on the way of life. And, if I were to ask you what that code is, most of you would likely respond with, “The Ten Commandments.” As Luther says in the Small Catechism, the Christian “code” of the Law given to Moses is first, a curb; second, a mirror; and third, a guide. The good works commanded by God for Christians to perform are a part of that third use of the Law: a guide. But, what is it

guiding you toward? Is it guiding you toward salvation? Certainly not by the good works themselves, but certainly in that they point you to the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is “the Way.” Jesus is the only one capable of performing truly good works, because He is without sin. We read in Article IV of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord from the Lutheran Confessions:

“Truly good works are done not by our own natural powers, but in this way: when a person is reconciled with God through faith and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Or, as Paul says, a person is ‘created in Christ Jesus for good works.’” They go on to say in response to works sustaining faith, “On the other hand, this does not mean that faith lays hold of righteousness and salvation only in the beginning and then resigns its office to works as though they had to sustain faith, the righteousness received, and salvation. It means that the promise, not only of receiving, but also of retaining righteousness and salvation, is firm and sure to us. St. Paul (Romans 5:2) ascribes to faith not only the entrance to grace, but says that we stand in grace and boast of the future glory. In other words, he credits the beginning, middle, and end to *faith alone*.”

So, when Christ says in our Gospel lesson in verse 6, “No one comes to the Father except through Me,” your faith points you to the fact that you stand before the Father only through the grace freely given to you on account of Christ. And where do you come to Christ? It is at the foot of the cross, and through the cross you teach others by the Word of the Gospel that the only way to salvation is through faith in Jesus.

In a land full of wokeism and evil masquerading as tolerance, many churches today are going to spew the heretical idea that there are many roads to heaven, despite the clear evidence in Scripture to the contrary. They will teach that as long as you go to church, say your prayers, and live a good life, trying your hardest to follow God’s commandments, you will find the end of your road in heaven. Even more than that, they may tell you that it’s ok if you don’t think Jesus was truly the God-man come into the world to die for your sins. As long as you believe in a general idea of God, you’ll make it through the narrow door just fine. The sinful world around you wants desperately to determine for Christians what “the way” is to heaven. And if you dare to stand up, strong in your faith, and proclaim that there is but one Way, this woke and “tolerant” world will shout you down and call you a hateful, bigoted, and wretched human being. You see, they are stuck in the way of death, and the way of death can do nothing more than envy the way of life.

This problem is not new to you as Christians. Society has long hated the idea that your salvation is beyond your control and that you play no part in earning that salvation. You certainly have a responsibility, once you are being guided on “The Way” by the Holy Spirit, to step up and live a good Christian life. However, it just doesn’t have anything to do with making it to eternal life. Even going back to the time of Paul, people were trying to put their own works in the formula for salvation. We read in Galatians 1:9-10, “As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

This is a verse I turn to very often when the struggles of our persecution as Christians can become heavy and burdensome. Who is it you are trying to please? Should you change the Gospel to suit the ways of the world? By no means! It is incumbent upon you to live the Gospel every day by remembering your baptisms and repenting of your sin. By the grace of God, you have progressed from the way of death to the way of life, and the world will constantly want you to turn back to the way of death. And you must always remember, that there is but one Way to follow, no matter the cost or disapproval you receive from man, and that way is the crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The truth of Jesus is your hope and consolation in this sinful and dying world. As the Psalmist writes in Psalm 94:19-22:

When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul. Can wicked rulers be allied with you, those who frame injustice by statute? They band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death. But the Lord has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge.

The evil forces at play in society will band together, as I just read, to condemn you for believing in “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” It can be a burdensome load to carry, and in those moments of weakness and despair, fear not! The Lord is with you! He is the Way of life, and following Him will bring you one day to your Father in heaven. The burdens of this world are heavy, but Jesus’ burden is light, as He says in Matthew 11:30. So, don’t place unnecessary burdens upon your faith. Know that Jesus Christ has died for your sins. He has cleansed you from all unrighteousness. And because of that gift of His grace, you live according to the faith He has given you through the Holy Spirit.

Televangelists, and the like, will tell you, “Sure, Jesus is the Way, but we still have to drive down the Way to get to heaven. That car isn’t going to drive itself.” Or, they may tell you that you need to “gas up your car” to get to heaven. So, as in most cases, they arrive back in a teaching of works-righteousness, that somehow they can pull themselves out of the way of death to life. The problem they have is that Jesus didn’t become a four-lane highway with exit ramps to take pit stops along the way to fuel up and ask for directions.

Hear from verses 3 and 4 of our Gospel lesson, “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.” A surface reading of this makes it plainly clear that Jesus is the one who will bring you to the heavenly dwelling. He will return to this place that has forsaken Him, and bring the faithful home to everlasting life with Him forever. You don’t need to find the way, or make sure you have enough gas to get there. All you need for the way of life is faith in Christ and His atoning sacrifice, given to you as a gift through the Holy Spirit in your baptisms, and strengthened through hearing His Word, and receiving His Holy Supper.

Earlier, I spoke about the third use of the Law being a guide. The power to follow that guide comes only from the saving Gospel you find in Jesus Christ, and He is the Way in which you walk the path to everlasting life. That guide is written on your hearts by the Holy Spirit through faith alone. It is not through your own power or merit that you share in His grace, but only the gracious gift of God received by faith. And those continually lost in the way of death must have the Gospel of Jesus Christ shared with them. For if they do not turn from the way of death to the way of life, they will be lost for eternity in the fires of hell. And for those of you on the way of life, you remember always that it is by the death and resurrection of your Lord Jesus Christ, and through your Baptisms into the same, that you become heirs of the Kingdom—the true people of God.

The Apostle Peter says in verse 10 of our Epistle lesson this morning, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” You are God’s people because you have passively received mercy from your God, through faith in Jesus Christ. A faith that is strengthened through further gifts from God, brought to you by the Holy Spirit in the Means of Grace. You are walking in the way of life, having been rescued from the way of death by the loving embrace of your Lord and Savior, who on the cross snatched you out of Satan’s clutches, but no one can snatch you out of His hand.

So, you don't point to some imaginary Star Wars creed, but you point to the baptismal font and proclaim, "This is the way." You point to the words of Holy Scripture and proclaim, "This is the way." You point to the Sacrament of the Altar, where The Way Himself is present bodily, in, with, and under the bread and wine and you proclaim, "This is the way." You are forgiven sinners, no longer condemned to the eternal fires of hell, because the truth of the way to salvation and everlasting life has been laid bare before you. And so, you point to the cross, and proclaim to all who would hear, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, "This...is...the Way!" Amen.