

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
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Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

So, little Teddy, our newest grandson, is now a whole 9 days old.

Everyone is doing great. Thank you ALL for your wonderful messages of congratulations and prayers of hope for him and new life.

I got to imagining what life will be like for Teddy.

He came into a world that is changing so quickly!

I remember the verse from *What a Wonderful World*:

I hear babies cry, I watch them grow. They'll learn much more than I'll ever know.

When I was born, there were still a good number of people in America without telephones, TVs or even indoor plumbing.

A lot has changed in the over 6 decades I've been hanging out here.

What changes will Teddy see in our fast-paced lives now?

Earlier this week, someone asked me if Gus and I had gone to Texas to see Teddy because there was a Facebook post that said Gus and I were "with"

Sarah, her husband Jim, Teddy, as well as our son, and Jim's parents and kids.

There were photos of all of us on the same Facebook page.

But this is the new world Teddy is in: all that togetherness was virtual.

The post was a collage of screen shots from several different Facetime calls.

Not one of us left home to see Teddy. I still haven't gotten to kiss his chubby cheeks, which is a big change from what grandmas got to do when I was born.

Teddy's world is already different from mine.

But some things haven't changed a lick.

One of them is how our experiences color how we see life, even how we experience new events.

I have a friend named Dr. Steve Graham, who's a psychologist. He wrote the other day about this.¹ He said, if we've been bullied, then when we hear someone use words that those who bullied us used, telling us to do stuff we don't want to do, we will say, "Hey! You're a bully!"

However, if instead, we grew up hearing that the world is an unsafe place, and that if we do as we're told, we'll be safe from harm, we would hear those same words as comforting reassurance from someone who knows how to keep us secure.

An example today is facemasks. Let's face it, they are awkward and uncomfortable, and sometimes, no matter what I do, my glasses steam up when I wear mine.

If we've been bullied, we might hear the insistence to wear a mask as forcing us to do something unpleasant, and want to resist it.

If, however, we fear for our health, and we trust the authorities who assure us that this will help us and others avoid disease, we willingly engage in this practice to keep us all safer.

Now, I'm NOT saying everyone who doesn't wear a mask has been bullied, or that everyone who does is a scaredy cat.

I AM saying that we can hear the very same words and, based on our personal experiences, reach totally different conclusions about what we should do

¹ Steve Graham, *The Road Less Traveled*, " <https://www.drstevegraham.com/the-road-less-traveled/>

The key for peace on our planet is for us to stop insisting
that OUR personal experiences invariably lead us to THE right conclusion,
that OUR way is THE ONLY way things should be done.

There are so many examples from history that teach us that those who were sure
they were absolutely right were in fact very, very wrong. I'll say just one word: Galileo.
So where is Jesus going with his claim to be THE Way, THE Truth, and THE Life?

Isn't there only one conclusion that can be drawn from this:

Believe in Jesus or Burn in Hell? I've heard that sermon, a bully's sermon.
Some people hear Jesus' words through a bully and feel threatened and appalled.
If God has to get things done through coercion, then count me out.

Eternity with that kind of God would be just as hellish as a lake of fire,
and I'll take my chances with the lake.

Some people hear Jesus' words through a beloved authority and feel relief:
Now I know what to do! What a wonderful God to give us a clear way forward!
Eternity with a God who has everything under control is just what I want.
Who wouldn't want to be with that God?

Which response is right? There's no answer to that question.

I have a hunch one of them resonates with each of you more than the other does.

None of us can answer that for someone else.

The problem, of course, is not with the responses.

The problem is with the initial statement: Believe now or burn after you die.

Is that the only possible message we can take from Jesus' statement?

Another reading is that Jesus is making not a threat, but an invitation,
an invitation to come with him to have live life to the fullest NOW,
one he can still make even after his life on earth has come to its tragic end
through the actions of both bullies and legal authorities.

Now that he is resurrected, Jesus says he is leaving, going to the Father.

Jesus going to the Father is the culmination of everything he did to fulfill God's mission for creation,
which Isaiah put it this way: the nations will come to God to be taught God's ways, and then
they will beat their swords into iron plows and their spears into pruning tools.

Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war.

Jesus is talking to his disciples the night before he dies at the hands

of people whose confidence is in their swords and spears, their ability to fight wars large and small.

That is not Jesus' way. This is not where he and the Father are taking us now.

The Way of God is not based not on the coercion of war but the invitation of relationship.

The Truth of God, the nature and purpose of God, are all all are revealed in the life of Jesus.

His every action – the healing, the feeding, the teaching, the welcoming,
and, yes, even the upending the moneychangers' tables in the Temple to end injustice –
all fulfill the mission of God to heal all creation.

Jesus' life, literally the life of God, is the Way and the Truth of God.

Through this life, all the nations – not just the people we like – live life to the fullest.

Life lived to the fullest is a life where we love our God, our neighbors, ourselves,
where we love others as Christ loved us.

The Way, the Truth and the Life Jesus embodies is an invitation to love as God loves,
which is to be love in action: to do what is best for the other, even if it costs us dearly, or,
as in the case of Jesus, it costs us everything.

Accept the invitation of believing in Jesus, trusting Jesus,
and you join in God's life, the way of Life lived to the fullest.

A life lived to its fullest, as the epistle says, is one that proclaims the goodness of God,
the mercy and light of God.

What happens if we don't accept the invitation? We will stumble in the darkness.

We will be in hell. God doesn't send us there, though. We send ourselves.

One of my favorite theologians is CS Lewis.

His description of hell is that it is a prison cell where the door is locked from the inside.

The way, the truth and the life as shown in Jesus

is that God yearns to be reconciled with all of humanity, all the nations.

Because God uses invitation instead of coercion, we are free to stick our fingers in our ears

and, as 1st Peter puts it, refuse to believe, refuse to trust, to live a life of self-absorption.

Lewis assures us that God will keep right on loving us even then, whether we like it or not.

God's love is one thing we can never escape from,

no matter how tightly we shut the door of our prison cell. God will wait for us forever.

God's mission includes not only giving us life to the full on this side of death,

but also patiently loving until hell is emptied on the other side.

Is it hard for you to believe in this kind of love?

On this Mothers Day, we celebrate the love we have for our mothers, and that our mothers have for us.

That's easy for me to buy into, because I've got both a fabulous mother and terrific kids.

Not everyone does.

Here's what I know, though: neither Sarah nor Mark, my kids, nor Teddy,

DID anything at all to deserve my love. They came out damp, squalling, and pretty much a mess.

But I've never known such fullness in my heart as the love I have for those damp, squalling bundles.

I love Teddy and I've never actually seen him. I've seen ultrasounds. I've see Facetimes.

I would cheerfully lie down in front of a bus for him. And I've never set my eyes on him.

But I don't think I'm unique! Do you think I'm unique?

Here's the key: however much we are loved, however much we love another, we can't out-love God.

God loves us more than the person who loves us the most,

and loves us more than we love the person we love the most.

If God really is God, and if God is love, and if we are to love others as ourselves,

and if hell is a desert of lovelessness and no place we'd want to be,

then the destiny God has created for the nations is for all to be forgiven, to be loved and to be free,

until all the people from all the nations

find their room in the Father's house Jesus has prepared for them.

What kind of life will Teddy have? Ultimately, that's something God and Teddy will work out together.

Here's what we can do to help ensure Teddy and all those babies, every person,

will grow up in the wonderful world God intends for us:

Pray. Pray a very specific prayer. Ask Jesus, in his name, every day,

that he be your Way, your Truth and your Life; to, like him, through your life,

embody the grace and mercy that is heaven.

Remember how I said at the beginning that our experiences color how we see life?

Every day, be determined to let someone experience heaven through you.

Be determined to be a slice of heaven for someone else, and you will change someone's life –
and not necessarily the other person's.

Start with your family, the people we too often treat the worst,

and then try doing it for someone you don't even know.

Then do the corollary: do everything in your power not to be a slice of hell for anyone to anyone at all.

If you fail at that, then you pray for forgiveness, remember the advice from Anne of Green Gables

that every day is a new day with no mistakes in it yet,

and try again: pray to Jesus asking that he will be your Way, your Truth, and your Life

and you to let you be heaven for someone else.

It's the prayer that always takes us where Jesus is going.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

COLLECT OF THE DAY:

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give us grace to love one another, to follow in the way of his commandments, and to share his risen life with all the world, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

ISAIAH 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah, Amoz's son, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house will be the highest of the mountains. It will be lifted above the hills; peoples will stream to it. Many nations will go and say, "Come, let's go up to the Lord's mountain, to the house of Jacob's God so that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in God's paths." Instruction will come from Zion; the Lord's word from Jerusalem. God will judge between the nations, and settle disputes of mighty nations. Then they will beat their swords into iron plows and their spears into pruning tools. Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war. Come, house of Jacob, let's walk by the Lord's light."

PSALM 67

May God be merciful to us and bless us, show us the light of his countenance and come to us.

Let your ways be known upon earth, your saving health among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,

for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has brought forth her increase; may God, our own God, give us his blessing.

May God give us his blessing, and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of him.

1 PETER 2:2-10

Instead, like a newborn baby, desire the pure milk of the word. Nourished by it, you will grow into salvation, since you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Now you are coming to him as to a living stone. Even though this stone was rejected by humans, from God's perspective it is chosen, valuable. You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Thus it is written in scripture, *Look! I am laying a cornerstone in Zion, chosen, valuable. The person who believes in him will never be shamed.* So God honors you who believe. For those who refuse to believe, though, the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone. This is a stone that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall. Because they refuse to believe in the word, they stumble. Indeed, this is the end to which they were appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. Once you weren't a people, but now you are God's people. Once you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

JOHN 14:1-14

[Jesus said,] "Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I'm going."

Thomas asked, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us."

Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don't speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does his works. Trust me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it."

SERMON HYMN: O, Zion Haste

BLESSING: The God who is creating a new heaven and a new earth, who walks where least expected, who disturbs the comfortable and comforts the distressed, and whom death could not control, now sends you out to announce with your lives that the Lord is risen indeed. Go, you are blessed in the name of our Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.