

Can you feel it? Excitement is in the air! Just stop by First Lutheran School or just about **any** school over the next few weeks and you will know what I mean. We're getting ever so close to the long-anticipated ***last day of school.***

High school seniors have just about made it to the goal of their education: graduation! Some colleges have already had their end of the school year commencement ceremonies. So, now what? Now life really gets interesting! Exciting, yes, but also perhaps a bit intimidating not knowing what's next. What am I going to do with my life? Will I be able to find a steady job that I like? Those going on to their next school are all wondering, will I like it there? What will my life look like a year from now, five years from now? For those going off to college, deep down their likely wondering: "Will I be okay on my own, away from my family?"

No matter what stage of life we're at, we're all trying to figure out our way through this world. Every single person on the planet wants to find peace - real, deep-down, lasting ***peace.*** Where do ***you*** go to find it? Life can get pretty overwhelming. There are exciting times and scary times; joyful times and sad. When life seems to be sailing along smooth and fine, we're okay, no worries. But, when "the waters get rough", times start to get desperate, even out-of-control where do we go? Where do we turn when things aren't going the way they're supposed to, when the right job is hard to find, when a spouse or significant other has hurt us, when friends abandon us, when bills are crushing us, sadness overwhelms us. Where do we go? Where do we turn when our hearts are troubled?

Into our fears, our doubts, and our uncertainties, steps the Son of God, Jesus Christ. "Let not your hearts be troubled." He says, "Believe in God. Believe also in me." The disciples, to whom Jesus is speaking in our text, were definitely filled with fear, doubts, and uncertainties. Jesus was telling them how He must soon leave them. They wanted to know why He was going, ***where*** He was going, and whether or not they were going to be able to go on without Him. Jesus explains to His anxious friends that He is going to the Father. He is going to prepare a place for all who trust in Him.

This is something He **has** to do, because it's the only way there will ever be true peace between God and people. It's also the only way we can have real peace in our lives.

The disciples knew something wasn't right that evening when they and Jesus were together in the upper room. They could sense it from the way Jesus was speaking to them about having to leave them. Jesus knew that in just a few hours soldiers would arrest Him. The Chief Priest would condemn Him. Pilate would sentence Him to death. The cross was His destination, and all of this would happen before the end of the very next sunset. As Jesus taught His disciples that night, He looked past the cross, beyond the resurrection, and out into eternity. He said, "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."

Of course, this all sounded fine and agreeable to the disciples until Jesus said the words, "You know the way to where I am going." Thomas spoke up for all of them and said, "Lord, we **don't** know where you are going. (So) How can we know the way?" Thomas also speaks for us and everyone who understands their own mortality, their own sinful nature, and just how uncertain life in this world can be.

We too would like to know the way - the way out of this world. We would like to know the way to a place where there is no fear, no doubts, no uncertainties. We would like to know the way to a world where there are no mass shootings at malls, schools, or **anywhere!** A place where there aren't any deaths, diseases, injuries, or chronic medical conditions. We would love to know the way to a place where our bodies will never wear out. We're all looking for a place of peace - peace with God and peace with other people. We're all looking for a place without sin, sorrow, or death. 'That place', Jesus says, 'is His Father's house.' And so, we join with Thomas and ask Jesus about the **way** to that place. Jesus answered Thomas and He answers us, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The way isn't a route we can take by reading a map or consulting an app on our phone. Instead, this "way" is a person, Jesus Christ Himself. We can't decide on our own to

travel this route. Instead, ***Jesus has to take us***. In fact, that's exactly what He promised when He said, "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

This way is totally different from every religion in the world. In some way, shape or form, every religion outside of Christianity teaches that we must work our own way into God's graces or we must achieve peace with "the universe" by our own right thinking or meditation. Some of those religions even talk about a "path," but it's a path that ***we*** have to walk with our own abilities. The false religions of the world set us up for Satan's one-two punch.

Yes, the devil is more than happy to feed our ego and tell us that we ***can*** earn our way into heaven, and the world is more than happy to help Satan out. The world sends us all kinds of messages that pump up our self-esteem - that tell us that the good works you need for heaven might be a bit of a challenge, but you can achieve it. People are basically good. Heaven is within our reach. We just have to put forth a little effort and heaven is ours. This is Satan's first punch. A lot of people fall victim to Satan's first punch. They go along thinking that they're living a full and fulfilling life. They become convinced that everything's in order; everything is right with them and the world. Then they die and discover that they'd been on the wide road that leads to destruction all along.

There are some people, though, who see through the lies. They're realistic enough to see that things aren't the way they're supposed to be and that they're not going to pull it off. They do a reality check and realize that they've been lied to; that they can never earn their way into heaven. It's then that Satan throws his second punch.

The second punch comes when Satan takes on his true identity as the accuser. He starts to pile on the guilt. Suddenly, all the bad things we've done in our lives come rushing into our conscience. We cringe as we remember all the foolish things we did in our youth. We shrink back at all the evil images that leap to our minds as memory after memory reveal our guilt and show us how truly sinful we are. The forces that once lied to us to convince us that we could make it into heaven now whiplash us into another lie. They work very hard to convince us that our sin is more

powerful than Jesus' forgiveness- that Jesus can no longer forgive us. That's the sin of despair.

This one-two punch of Satan's is the reason we can take so much comfort, so much **joy**, in the fact that Jesus Christ is the one and only way. Jesus is the only one who endured the **worst** temptations of the devil and the world and remained without sin. As the only perfect human, Jesus is the only one who could satisfy God's justice. He's the only one who could endure God's wrath against sin which He did for us on the Cross. His holy nature as God's Son makes Him the only one whom death could not hold. This is how He became the way for us to enter into His Father's house. We have confidence that He is the way because He rose from the dead. This is the reason He could say, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." His resurrection assures us that we too will rise from death and that He will take us to live with Him forever.

Notice that Jesus said, "I **am** the way." He didn't say, "I will **be** the way." No, He **is** the way for us right **now**. That means that we don't wait for the day when all the rooms in the Father's House will be ready - the day when everyone will rise. Jesus already brings His presence to us now. Jesus has promised, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:20). That includes especially where we are at right now- in worship. Here we receive forgiveness for our sins, strength for our faith. Here we come to worship our Lord and to support our fellow believers. Jesus also said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). His promises tell us that He is with us even though we can't see Him and that means that eternal life with Jesus has already begun for those who believe in Him. It began when we were baptized in His powerful name!

What amazing words of comfort Jesus shared with His disciples that night. What amazing words He shares with us today! His words are full of assurance. How good it is to know that Jesus is preparing a perfect place for each and every one of us in His Father's house. How reassuring it is to know that Jesus will bring us to His Father's house safely because He Himself is the way. How amazing it is to know that even though we can't

yet see Him, Jesus is here with us every step of the way through life. Yes, Jesus is the only place, the only **One**, to go to find real peace.

A few years ago, I remember seeing a bumper sticker that read: “No Jesus? (N-O) No Peace. Know Jesus? (K-N-O-W) Know Peace!” Jesus has come to give us His peace- real, deep-down, lasting peace. Peace that we can know. Trusting in Him, we can always have that peace because Jesus is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life!” Amen