

5th Sunday of Easter

“Sometimes I’m wrong.” I find myself saying this a lot in conversations—recently when I had to admit I misremembered something that happened decades ago. Now, sometimes I’m right and nobody listens to me, but sometimes I’m wrong, and they do.

Overconfidence starts from a simple fallacy. We do some things well, so we think we can do other things just as well. Even when someone else could give good advice or excel at executing plans, we may overly rely on our own abilities when they are weak. We may even cause other people to perform inadequately when we lack proper vision.

In the spiritual life, this enters our relationship with God. We have a lot of gifts, and we’re able to do many things well. That brings temptation that we can do all things well. When big questions come our way, we may avoid seeking counsel in prayer, or, having discerned what God wants, we doubt it. Self-reliance can lead to distrust in God.

At the Last Supper, after washing the feet of the disciples and observing the departure of Judas, Jesus sat down with his friends to begin his final discourse. We hear parts of it today and next Sunday. In light of his upcoming death, he offers some assurances, but two of the disciples, Thomas and Philip, ask questions that reveal how little they’ve understood when Jesus had little time left. Thomas said, “We don’t know where you’re going; how can we know the way?” Philip said, “show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” You can practically see Jesus rolling his eyes at each of these observations.

Jesus had a plan for them. He said, “I am going to prepare a place for you.” They could not prepare an eternal dwelling place on their own; he would do that. Then, more than getting the place ready, he said, “I will come back again and take you to myself.” They didn’t have to get there alone—even though, you’d think, after being with Jesus every day for years, they’d know the way.

Thomas’ question, “How can we know the way?” led to one of the most memorable lines from this discourse. Jesus turned on him, as if speaking to a birdbrain, and said, “I am the way.” For good measure, he added, he is also the truth and the life.

Truth disappears when overconfidence rises. We don’t look frankly at our own weaknesses. We kid ourselves about what we can do. Sometimes we’re wrong. The truth is our friend. The disciples didn’t know where they were headed or how to get there—as long as they relied on themselves. But they didn’t have to. Jesus revealed the destination, the Father’s dwelling place, and the way there, Jesus himself. When they accepted this truth, they gained life.

We want to use our God-given gifts generously, but one of those gifts is knowing what we can’t do. Another is trusting those who can. Often, that means trusting Christ. He is the way, and the truth, and the life.