

# Ponderings from a Presbyterian Pilgrim



*Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"*

*Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know Him and have seen Him."*

*John 14:6-7*

During the season of our Lenten journey to both the Cross and the Empty Tomb which are at the center of our faith, I am extremely mindful of how very powerful are those words of Jesus as recorded by the evangelist John. And yet, for me, they have never seemed commandment as much as invitation. Jesus invites us to accompany Him for a journey through the Cross and past the Empty Tomb so that we might really know the presence of God in our lives. But on our journey together as critical lovers or loving critics within our Presbyterian system, I want us to focus on that part of McNeil's statement that calls us to become people of deep prayer and to hear what the Spirit is calling us to. Prayer is that instrument of our faith that has the capacity not only to hear the Spirit but to respond to the will of God expressed to us by the Spirit. We ignore prayer on our common journey at the peril of our life together.

Michael Lindvall, senior pastor of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City, writes the following in his book [A Geography of God: Exploring the Christian Journey](#):

*The Way that is Jesus Christ does not lead us out of real life. Rather, it fills this earthly life with transcendence. The Way is not even "spiritual" in the limp and sentimental sense of that word. Jesus Christ passed through life as it really is, rough edges, disappointments, and terrors included. His life cut a trail for us and laid out a path. His cross stands as the low-water mark of life, emblem of a life drained empty. His Way leads us through our lives as they are—complicated mixtures of joy and disappointment, strange stews of nobility and pettiness. His Way has dirt under its fingernails. It goes as deep as life goes; through the cramped office where you face awkward moral choices, through your new house with the windows that never worked right, through the bedroom where you make love, past the TV you channel surf when you're bored and alone. The Way walks you through classrooms where ghost-written midterm essays are routine. It is with you at the table where you eat spaghetti with a sulky teenager. The Way is not a way out of this world. In the end, the Way leads us into a life that may please us deeply. But more to the point, it leads into a life that is pleasing to God. In this integrity between a life that is joy to me and pleasing to God, the Way brings us not mere pleasure, but brings us into a joy that lies on the other side of happiness. (p. 57)*

Certainly the Way of the Cross did not bring Jesus pleasure, but that Way brought a joy that was fully on the other side of happiness. The joy of resurrection and the promise of eternal life provided an exit for what seemed like the dead end of the cross and the tomb. But before Jesus could know that joy and that promise, of course, he passed through life as it really is: rough edges, disappointments and terrors included.

Our life together as Presbyterians on the journey of faith is a life following the Way of Jesus Christ. And yet even as we follow Jesus on that journey, we know that Jesus is leading us through our lives in all the ways that our lives unfold...all the complicated mixtures of joy and disappointment, all the strange stews of nobility and pettiness. And I rejoice that once again we have entered this season of Lent, this season that invites us to join Jesus for the whole journey...a journey not out of this world, but through this world and through the life that God promises us!

On the Way,

Alan