



Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 Ramsey Road, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Pastor Neal Buckaloo
Sunday, May 22, 2011, The Fifth Sunday of Easter
"Stepping into the Promise"

First steps are always big steps! An infant of approximately 12 months has struggled to stand, holding onto whatever is available. There comes the day the infant dares to let go, and take that first cautious step. New ground is literally being explored. An expanding promise leads. One step leads to two and on to multiple steps. There is running and skipping. There is navigating uneven ground.

Yet first steps do not end there. We face first adventures alone, without parents or siblings. We experience 'being lost.' As a child we are driven by the thought of 'growing up' and becoming a 'grownup.' Our lives are a series of first steps into a promise or opportunity or adventure we have not experienced before.

Biblically, Abram and Sara had to decide to step into the promise of God by leaving extended family behind and venturing to a new and strange land as resident aliens. Genesis 12: ¹ *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." . . .⁴ . . . Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.* So are the age of seventy-five, Abram and Sara stepped into a Promise from God.

Taking that first step is not a guarantee of success. When, as John's Gospel reports, Jesus washed his disciples' feet at the last supper, Peter at first refused to have Jesus wash his feet. John 13: ⁸ *Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"* Yet it was also Peter who the next day denied knowing Jesus three times.

What are the first steps that have been important in your life? What do you remember of those days and the thoughts that entered your mind? Firsts include the first day of school, the first day in a new school, first jobs, first loan, first car, first home. The commitment to a marriage, the commitment to be responsible to another for their welfare, these are all big steps.

And what goes through the mind of a young infantry soldier, carrying a loaded gun and hand grenades hanging from his belt, as he goes into battle? What takes place within you when you are thrust into strange and unfamiliar territory?

Philip, Thomas, and the other disciples are taking a first step in the Gospel for today. Jesus has made it clear he is leaving them. They and others have followed Jesus for three years. They have committed their adult lives to following him. Now he says he will leave them. The obvious question is, "What are we supposed to do now?"

Faith is more trust in God than knowing or memorizing a set of doctrines. Doctrines help and guide our thinking. But is knowing and being known by God builds the trust of faith. Having faith for the disciples meant following Jesus. Now he is going to leave them. John 14: ⁵ *Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also."*

Jesus reminds then that though they have had Jesus with them as a tangible human being, they, through him, have also known God the Father. John 14: 8 *Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."* 9 *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me."*

The step of faith is to step into the promise of God shown to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The more deeply we know Jesus, the more deeply we know God. Jesus is our window, our access. For Martin Luther the center of all scripture is Christ. Luther makes the point that what we know of God we know through his Son. Theologians and others have speculated about God for centuries. For Luther, we should not trade what we know of God through Jesus Christ for the speculation of philosophers or theologians or the ponderings or musings of our own minds.

To know Jesus is to know the Father. To know Jesus is to know the author of creation itself. Paul the Apostle reminds himself and us, ^{1 Corinthians 13: 12} *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

Stepping into the promise of God is to embrace Jesus' words, ^{John 14:6b} *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you know me, you will know my Father also."*

Further, Jesus tells us, ^{John 10:10} *"I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."* John 12: ⁴⁴ *Jesus cried aloud: "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. 46 I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. 47 I . . . came not to judge the world, but to save the world. . . 49 for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me."* Jesus invites you to step into the Promise of God given for you.