

So today we are starting a new series for 2024, and we will follow this throughout our Family Services, as we look at Road signs. I'm sure whether you are going to school or your mum & dad are taking you out somewhere, there are many road signs that you go past and you probably completely ignore them or you've seen them so many times that you now just take them for granted.

And every month that we gather we are going to keep adding to these road signs. And my sign will change every time to a new road sign that's going to help us think about living our lives for God.

Now as we think each month about this theme of Roadsigns, we are going to have a verse that will follow us each month, and I hope as we keep going, all of us will be able to learn this verse from the Bible. It's from Jeremiah 31:21. This will help us think about the direction that we need for life. Let me read it to you, and these are words from God for each of us – He says "Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take".

So all the signs that we are going to study each month have very important spiritual meanings for us. And so today we are going to look at our first road sign – here it is 'ONE WAY'. And as you were listening to the bible reading today, you may have picked up something that Jesus said about One Way. Let me read the verse again which is from John 14:6 where Jesus says "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*".

So today we are going to talk, using this road sign of One Way, to understand that Jesus is the only way that we have eternal life.

So why did Jesus say this? Well you see, Jesus was trying to comfort his disciples because they were upset that Jesus was about to leave them. He was about to go to the cross and die. And so Jesus is reassuring them that everything is going to be ok, because he was going away to prepare a place for them all to come to. But Thomas was really confused and so he wants to know exactly where Jesus is going, because he wants to know the way to find him. Which is why Jesus then says that He is the way.

I don't know about you, but whenever I go on a trip, in particular somewhere where I have never been before I will use my sat nav in my car, or I will look at a map to help me understand how to get to that place. Now the amazing thing about a SatNav in a car is that it will normally give you different routes to get to the place you are going. It will give you the most direct route. It will also give you a route that might avoid country roads which might be more difficult to travel along – it might take you a bit longer, but you will still get there. And sometimes when I am planning a route on SATNAV it will show that there are roadworks on the route ahead, and will show me a diversion to avoid those roadworks. So then I have to decide which route is best for me.

So today I thought that we would get someone to follow some directions. I'm going to play a little game with you today. I have a gift here at the front of the church. It's a box of celebrations. And I need someone to help me today. I have 2 routes, and I want you to pick

one of these and follow the directions. One is going to take you up this way, and the other one is going to take you past all these sweets – now whatever your route you take you can have whatever you find along the way, you can keep it.

Route that is direct and easy – bottom of the church to the top and collect the prize

Route that has you going through many diversions / distractions such as lots of sweets and crisps and drinks.

Do you see today that you had a choice. One route was pretty straightforward and led to the celebrations, but the other route had many distractions along the way – unfortunately that route didn't lead to the celebrations.

And in life, we all have to make decisions that are best for us. Along the way we may make wrong decisions, and that's going to happen because we're all human – we can't get it right all the time. But we have got to be very careful with the decision about eternity. You see God loves each one of us so much, that he wants us to be with him forever – he wants us to enjoy the celebration with him. When Jesus died he knew that he would be with his Father in heaven. He wanted the same of his disciples, that when they would die they would be with him in heaven. And so Jesus was telling them, that whilst there would be many decisions to make in life, the most important one was to follow Jesus. Without following Jesus, there was no way of getting to be with his Father God.

And so this road sign helps us think a lot about this. It says ONE WAY.

[CHRIST CHURCH] If our mum or dad are driving into Ballynure and they decided that they needed to go to the Co-Op to buy you some sweets, can you imagine what would happen if they come along the road and take the first right hand turn just where the Methodist Church is. If they did that I'm guessing they might run into a problem. Why? Because over the past few years the road now is one-way. We know that they need to go down to the next road and turn right. But why can't they not turn right down the one-way street – because it's designed to make life easier for everyone. It's one way.

{ST JOHN'S} If our mum or dad are driving through Ballyclare, and they want to go towards the Comrades football ground, but as they come down the Doagh Road past St John's Church, they decide that instead of going round the town square they just decide to go right and down past Pats of Coffee and past Time Coffee shop that way, then it's very possible that they are going to meet traffic coming the other way. So who is right and who is wrong? Yes, your mum and dad are wrong because we all know that the traffic around the square is one way. It's designed like that to make life easier for everyone.

So the lesson we learn about the One Way sign is this – it's there to protect people. Because if we ignore One Way signs what's going to happen? Yes, we are going to have an accident, and we might not actually get to where we had hoped.

And similarly in life, Jesus says that he is the only way to God. We may think we want to try to get to God another way – maybe by following a different religion, or maybe by thinking if

we are really good then that will work, or thinking that if we do lots of kind things for people that will get me right with God. None of those are true. Jesus says that he is the only way – so no other faith will get us to God, always being good will not get us to God (although it is a good thing), doing lots of things to help others will not get us to God (and again those are lovely things to do). From today's reading we know that Jesus says that he is the only way. What does that mean? Well it means we have to follow Jesus, we shouldn't allow anything else to get in the way of that – we must believe in our hearts that he is God, and that he came to earth, and in love he died and rose so that he could destroy the power of sin (on that cross he destroyed all the mess that exists in life) – we have got to believe that.

So if we want to go in the right direction in our life, follow what Jesus did in life. How do we do that? Well read the bible every day – that will be like our map or our SATNAV that tells us how to live the life that God wants us to live. Also pray to God every day. His Holy Spirit was given to each of us to guide us so that we make the right choices.

If today you don't think that Jesus directs you – that's he's not the way, the truth and the life, then make this prayer today your own :

*Jesus, I know that in my life I have not followed you. I know that I need you to direct me every day. Forgive me where I have put myself first before you and others. I thank you that you have taken my sins to the cross and through your resurrection I can be free. Come into my life today Holy Spirit. I know that you are the only way, the truth and the life that I need. I choose to follow you. Amen."*