

5.11.08

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14.1-12

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

Saying good bye to someone we care about is difficult and often emotional. BBC experienced this last Sunday with Pastor Mary's final worship service until she returns from her deployment in September. When we know we are leaving and may not see someone again for a while, we try to share words that are important. That is what Jesus is doing in John 14 as he speaks with his disciples as he prepares to leave them.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.

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, so that where I am, there you may be also.

And you know **the way** to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "*Lord, we do not know where you are going.*

*How can we know **the way**?"*

Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.**

No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you know me, you will know my Father also.

From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "*Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.*"

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*'? 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. **Believe me** that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then **believe me** because of the works themselves."

Of all the "I am" sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel, this one may be the most challenging to grasp. It is harder to visualize the way, the truth and the life than it is bread, light or a shepherd. Not only that, Jesus' claim that "*No one comes to the Father except through me*" may be seen by some as exclusive, arrogant or dismissive of other faiths. This may raise questions for some people, such as, "*What about everyone else? What about people of a different faith or no faith? Does this mean they can't know God? That their faith is not valid or empty?*" *What about people who never had the opportunity to even hear about Jesus? What happens to them?*"

There are some questions that do not have easy answers, but we worship a God who is big enough to handle them and loving and wise enough to be just towards all people. I think it is important to emphasize what we *know* as followers of Jesus rather than to *speculate* about what we may not or cannot know for sure. What we know is that through Jesus **we find the way to God, the truth about God, and life in all its fullness in relationship to God.** We can give an account of the hope that is *in us* because of Jesus and we can do so with gentleness and respect or reverence (1 Peter 3:15). We also can share Jesus with others as well (see Acts 3:1-10, especially verse 6). We don't have to give an account for other people or other faiths, only for ourselves.

While this may be a challenging saying of Jesus in some ways, for many of us this is the most comforting of all the "I am" sayings of Jesus. It is one I use frequently at the bedside of someone who is dying or at memorial services, funerals, and graveside services because Jesus' words about going to prepare a place for us and then coming again to take us so that we may be with him are very reassuring both to a person who is dying as well as to a family that has experienced a loss. We hold on strongly to the hope that we will see our loved one again and see Jesus face to face because of these verses in John 14.

Maybe John wants us to be comforted by Jesus' promise and at the same time uncomfortable enough to be motivated to make sure we are walking in the Way of Jesus and sharing that Way with others. So let's take a little deeper look.

Jesus as the Way

Jesus spoke about *going the way* himself before he spoke about *being the way* for others. When Jesus speaks in John 13:33, 36 about "where I am going" – he is referring to both his destination and his route.

Jesus' Destination

In John Jesus' speaks of going to the one who sent him (7:33-34), for us as readers, we know God sent Jesus (5:23-24; 6:38-39).

John 13:1, 3 tells us Jesus has come from God and is going to God.

Then Jesus says he is going to his Father's house with its many rooms (14:2-4).

Where is Jesus going – he is going to God.

Jesus' Route

The route Jesus will take to his destination is his passion – the betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion he endures culminating in the resurrection – all of this belongs to the way by which he returns to the Father. Jesus speaks about going where no one else can go

(13:30-33). He is going by way of the cross. The disciples don't understand the way of Jesus prior to the passion as Thomas makes clear by objecting, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:5).

Jesus says "I am the way" (14:6) after he has spoken about going the way himself (14:4). The word "**way**" (**Greek *hodos***) at a practical level was used for paved roads that linked cities and carried a steady stream of travelers, soldiers, and merchants across the Roman Empire; it was used for the dirt paths that meandered from one village to another. **At another level, the term was used for a way of life.** The Scriptures call obedience to God **the way of truth** (Psalm 86:11; 119:30), which brings life rather than death (Psalm 16:11; Proverbs 15:24; Jeremiah 21:8). **Long before Jesus came along, the prophets spoke of the Way of the Lord**, "And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying

"This is the way; walk in it". Isaiah 30:21

"Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am the Lord your God, **who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go.**

Isaiah 48:17

But this command I gave them, "**Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.**" Jeremiah 7:23

Before people who followed Jesus were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26) they were first known as those "who belonged to the Way"(Acts 9:2).

Jesus says he is the Way, and the truth. Why is truth important? Because you don't want to climb a ladder of success and get to the top only to find it was leaning against the wrong wall. We don't want to live our life based on a lie, or build our life on something that is not trustworthy and dependable or life giving. When truth is absent so is trust – this is true in a friendship, a marriage, or a family; it is true in a church, a state or even a nation – if someone isn't truthful, then it is hard to trust him or her and respect and confidence in that person diminishes. When Jesus says he is the truth he is saying very simply that we can trust him, we can rely on him, we can believe what he is telling us is so.

Truth is an important word in John's Gospel

The prologue sets the stage for who Jesus is and what he comes to share.

*“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory; the glory as of a father’s only son, full of **grace and truth**. The law indeed was given through Moses; **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ.”* John 1:14,17

To know the love of God that Jesus reveals is to the truth that sets us free from the grip of sin as we live as he taught. *“Jesus said..., “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the **truth**, and the **truth** will make you free.”* John 8:32

Today is also known as Pentecost Sunday, the day when the church celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit to believers to empower and equip them for Christian living. In John the Holy Spirit is also known as the Spirit of truth. Jesus says, *“When the Spirit of **truth** comes, he will guide you into all **truth**; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”* John 16:13

Jesus prays to God that we will know the truth:

*“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is **truth**.”* John 17:17

Finally during his trial, Jesus has the following exchange with Pilate:

*“Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the **truth**. Everyone who belongs to the **truth** listens to my voice.”* John 18:37

By going the way of the cross and resurrection, Jesus embodies the way and the truth. Jesus is the truth, we can rely on him and trust him.

Finally Jesus says he is **the Life**. Have you noticed that underneath the I Am sayings of Jesus the one word that keeps coming up is **Life**?

Week 1 - I am the bread of life.

Week 2 – “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Week 3 - “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

Week 4 “I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Week 5 “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, **will live.”**

Week 6 “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

Jesus talks about it in a lot of different ways but I think it is pretty clear that what Jesus is trying to give to all who will receive him is **LIFE**.

In the musical Fiddler on the Roof, the main character Tevye, sings a song, To Life.

That is what Jesus gives – life.

Life that is truly satisfying and meets our deepest needs.

Life that illuminates our path.

Abundant life that begins now in the present.

Life that has been given to us by someone else giving up his life.

Life that conquers death.

True life which is found on the way of loving self-sacrifice.

Jesus said, I am the way, and the truth and the life. Jesus is not trying to exclude people when he says, *“No one comes to the father except through me.”* He is stating the belief that all people are estranged or separated from God because of sin. None of us can come to God simply on our own merits, period. No one is being excluded - all humanity is in the same situation. *“No one comes to the Father, except...”* The word “except” is like a window that lets light into a closed room. When I was a boy I can still remember my dad who used to get up at about 4:45 in the morning, coming into my room, taking the old roll up shade and giving it a pull and the whole thing flying to the top and flipping around a few times. Light would flood the room and my dad would always say, “Rise and shine.” Jesus is like the light that floods a darkened room and give us hope.

Jesus bridges the chasm that separates people from God. Through him people may come to know and be in relationship with God.

Jesus offers us relationship with God, the question is, what do we do with that opportunity? Will we make the most of it?

Prayer: Jesus we thank you that you were willing to go the way of the cross for us and we thank you almighty God for raising Jesus to life. Help us to follow Jesus in his way of self-sacrificing love, enable us to live according to his truth, thankful that we can trust and rely upon your word. Finally we humbly rejoice that you have graciously provided for all of us the gift of life we all are seeking – life that even conquers death. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Blessing:

Grace, mercy, and peace be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love. May we as God's children walk in the truth, just as we have been commanded. (Adapted from 2 John 1:1-4)

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Ephesians 2:10