



This is the Way – Touchpoint for May 3, 2023

John 14:1-14 (NRSVUE) *“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.

“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”

Ok, let’s get right to it. No sense wasting time here. These two sentences from the Bible probably have been used more than any other sentences to exclude, prohibit, and narrow the presence of Christ and Christianity in relationship to the world.

Which is really quite remarkable when you think about it. After all, ‘life’ is not a small, narrow word. It pretty much encompasses everything. Everything is a part of ‘life.’ Life is bigger than us. We don’t hold life in our hands. Life holds us in its hands.

And ‘truth’ is no small word either. When we talk about “Truth with a capital T,” or the “Big Truth,” we are talking about the Truth that contains all truths.

And even the word ‘way’ is big. We are all ‘on the way.’ Life involves being ‘on the way,’ because life is ever-changing. You are not a ‘by the way.’ You are ‘on the way.’ Though sometimes people get ‘in the way’ – I will grant you that.

Life, Truth, Way. These are huge words, meant to encompass and contain everything. And Christ says he is all of these things.

This statement is so vast in its meaning, its symbolism, its implications, that it is staggering. And what do we do with this breathtaking statement of life, truth, and way? We focus on the word ‘the.’

*“I am **THE** way, and **THE** truth, and **THE** life.”*

All so we can reduce Christ down to our level of exclusivity. Really, how puny are our minds? How small is our understanding? How insecure is our faith?

We take our definition of the Christ, and then say all truth must fit into that (**OUR** definition), rather than finding truth wherever we can, and saying “There is the Christ, because Christ is Truth.” Or looking at all of life and saying, “Christ is there, because Christ is Life.”

We think we have to fit the Christ into our way, our truth, and our life, when the Christ has taken us up into God’s Way, Truth, and Life.

It really would be better if we took out the word ‘THE,’ and simply read it as:

“I am Way, Truth, and Life.”

This passage is not a reduction of the concepts of life, truth, and way to Jesus. It is an expansion of the understanding of the Christ into all truth, all life, all way.

Of course, that is a threat to our little spiritual and denominational egos. We much prefer a Jesus, a Christ, a God... who will stay with us in our little sheep pens and sheep folds rather than lead us out into life, and truth, and ways beyond our imagination.

Let me share with you my own experience of encountering the vastness and inclusiveness of God's presence. And I have shared it with you before, but I think it is worth repeating, because nothing changed my life more than this.

When I was 22, I had just graduated from college. Being tired of school and not wanting to go immediately to seminary, I decided to go to Japan as a short-term missionary with the old American Lutheran Church Synod.

I was going to go to Japan for two years. I was going to take God to that god-forsaken land. I was going to take the love of Christ to that loveless society. I was going to take God's grace to that graceless culture. So you can imagine my surprise when I got there and went to live in a small country village, where the nearest native English speaker that I knew was two hours away by train...

You can imagine my surprise that when I got there, I discovered God was already there.

I know, what a shock to realize that God hadn't waited until 1978 to show up in Japan for the first time!

What a shock to realize that God hadn't waited, until I had attained the immense wisdom of a 22 year-old, to show up for the first time in Japan through me!

As I said before, how puny are our minds? How small is our understanding? How insecure is our faith? And I'm talking about me here, you can make your own decision about you.

And here is what I discovered:

In the way of life of Japan, Christ was and is there.

In the truth of Japan as they understand and define it, Christ was and is there.

In the experience of life as it is lived in Japan, Christ was and is there.

And whether they named it as I did, didn't matter. Christ was there in their way, their truth, their life. Because their way, their truth, their life, was enveloped by his way, his truth, his life.

“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.’”

Perhaps this text will answer the question once and for all about ‘whether there are many roads that lead to God or only one road that leads to God’?

The answer is ‘neither’ or ‘none.’ No roads lead to God because God has come to us. In fact, God has become the road – the way itself.

Thomas is looking for a way to God. Jesus tells him not only that God has come to him, but God has become the way itself.

In other words, God is not a destination. God is the way of life. God is the journey of life. So when one journeys in life, one experiences the Christ. And when one experiences truth on the way of life, one experiences the Christ. In fact, when one experiences life itself – the tasting, touching, seeing, feeling, breathing existence of life – then you have experienced Christ. Isn't that what holy communion teaches us?

“I am Way, Truth, and Life” is not an exclusive statement. It is an inclusive statement.

Just like Jesus saying, *“No one comes to the Father but by me.”* This is inclusive, not exclusive. Why? Because what Jesus is saying is that:

“Anything that puts you in contact with the Father is the Christ.”

So a sunrise, a sunset, gardening, a nature hike, having a baby snuggle in that nook between your shoulder and neck. Why, even a little bread and wine with others... All these are the Christ because they bring us in contact with the Creator/Father, and whatever brings you in contact with the Creator is the Christ. As Jesus said, *“No one comes to the Father but by me.”*

The Christ, it seems, is more of a verb than a noun.

So why do we have such trouble with this passage? Brian McLaren gives some insight into this when he writes:

Richard Rohr often recounts a story from seminary, when a professor ended ... the semester by saying that Christian theology has in many ways been more influenced by the thought of Greek philosophers than by Jesus' thinking. A case in point is the Greek idea of absolute perfection, the idea that if something is transcendent, it is unchangeable, immovable, absolute, and incapable of transition. Because we want to lift God to the highest level possible, many of us were taught to conceive of God in this Greek category of perfection. After all, what's the alternative—imperfection?

McLaren then reflects on his own study of Genesis:

I had been preaching through the creation story of Genesis, and I realized that the universe described there didn't fit with the categories of Greek philosophy. The universe fashioned by the word and creative character of God was not immovable. It was not absolute and incapable of change. It was not immutable or static or, in the Greek sense, perfect....

In the Hebrew poetry of Genesis 1, God's creation was, simply put, in process. It started simple and grew more complex. It started in chaos, and order took shape. It started without life, and life "sprang forth" and "multiplied." A sentence formed in my head that day ... "Hebrew good is better than Greek perfect."

In other words, Greek perfect is static, but Hebrew good is dynamic. Greek perfect is sterile and changeless, but Hebrew good is fertile and fruitful....

Could this deep-seated understanding help explain why so many Christians today remain chained to the past, unable to imagine that change could be for the better, unable to accept that the present order, while superior to the past for some, is still deeply unjust for many and therefore deserves to be challenged and changed? Could sin be better understood as a refusal to accept needed change, a refusal to grow, a resistance to the arc of transition that bends toward justice?

Perhaps you can look at this world in transition and dare to echo God in Genesis [1:31]: "Behold, it is good ... it is very good." Perhaps you can see transition as an essential part of that goodness that is better than perfection.

Again, think of the creation story. God RESTS from creating on the 7th day. It doesn't say God STOPS creating from the 7th day on. God RESTS.

So from a Hebrew perspective, God's 'goodness,' God's 'perfection,' God's 'holiness' is fluid, changing, transformational. This is why Jesus can describe himself as "Way" and "Life," words that are fluid and changing, and even as "Truth."

"I am Way, Truth, and Life" is not an exclusive statement. It is an inclusive statement, meant to include all.

This passage tells us where God is on our journey or way of living... where God is in our relationships of truth... where God is in our life. The good news of this text is to proclaim to us that God is not only with us in all those things. God is those very things. And so we can never be separated from God.

Or to summarize: the Way, the journey of living, is a dwelling in God. And living in Truth (which is a verb, not a noun... a relationship, not a fact) is a dwelling in God. And being alive, Life itself, is a dwelling in God. These are all dwelling places in God, for God is all these things.

And so I am back to where I started:

It is the Mystery in whom we live (that's the LIFE)... and move (that's the WAY)... and have our being (that's our TRUE relationship)!

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come Drink of Living Water

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Come drink of living water. Never thirst again.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

(National Lutheran Choir, Peter C. Lutkin)

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord lift his countenance upon you... and give you peace.
The Lord make his face to shine upon you... and be gracious unto you.
The Lord be gracious unto you. Amen.