

Sermon 052216 Journeying  
Scripture John 14: 1-14  
Sermon Title- Heading Home

In a recent Bible study session, I made the statement that I do not believe that Jesus is the only way to God. Someone in the session was taken aback. That's not the first time that happened in the Bible study, by the way. I said that Jesus is the way for me, but I have a healthy respect for other religious traditions. We went back and forth on the issue until I got to a point of suggesting that we put the question in the parking lot to be dealt with later. I decided to dedicate this sermon to the topic. The confusion, I think, was centered in this morning's gospel lesson. It is the Gospel of John, Chapter 14, Verse 6 "Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

The question is a good one. Only Jesus or are there other ways to God? Is Jesus the only way to experience God? This passage is proof text for many Christians who believe that anyone who does not fully accept that the only path to God is through Jesus will never be saved.

I told my inquisitor that I do not believe that Jesus is the only way to experience God. I do have the experience of God through Jesus. The experience of God for me contains Jesus, but is not exclusively through Jesus. I have spoken before of Irish lore and

the notion of ‘thin places’ where God is experienced more readily than in other places. Mountaintops, the sea, a beautiful amber dawn, are ‘thin places,’ experiences of the wonder of God’s creation. I would find it hard not to think of God in those settings. It just seems to me that with 7 Billion people in the world today that there can be only one manifestation of God. I have said it often that we all have the right to our only beliefs. I fully respect my inquisitor’s right to believe that Jesus is the only way to God. I not only respect that but that person knows she is in my heart.

The Gospel writer John’s project is to show that Jesus is God in the world, so the statement, “No one comes to the Father except through me,” is important to the case he was building for the divinity of Jesus.

I do not feel bound to the idea that if it says so in Scripture, that is the end all and be of the story. Today however, I want to revisit how God *is* found through Jesus.

Years ago, there was a movie about the life of Jesus called, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. The movie was not the greatest movie ever made but the story of Jesus is surely the greatest story ever told.

There was once a man named Jesus who came out of a small town called Nazareth. It became apparent to those who knew him that Jesus was more than the son of Mary and Joseph the carpenter.

There was something about him that made people think “God.” His character, what he did, what he said, the way he behaved, the way he treated people, the way he helped people, the way he made people feel better made them think that they were in the presence of God.

I expect you have all known a person like this. A person who, when you are in his or her presence, makes you think better thoughts, makes you try to live a better life, reflect on God, become more devotional, more spiritual. Multiply that a thousand times and you have Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus, people found the ultimate thin place, the experience of being in the presence of God.

More than any other experience of God, Jesus displays for us the nature of God. John’s Gospel, more than any other document in the Bible, teaches us that Jesus is of God, is from God, and is God. Jesus became an itinerant preacher, faith healer, and miracle worker as he walked the earth. He was on a journey with a purpose, with a goal, and a destination. The purpose was to redeem people, save them from their sinfulness, and to teach them how to treat people. The goal was to sacrifice his human self for the salvation of the people who realized who he was. The destination is eternal life as his divine self.

So, Jesus was on a journey in this world and teaches us that we are on a journey, too. We learn that our destination is his destination. And the way for us to get there is to follow him.

He says, “I am the way.” Jesus is the way out. We are all captives and slaves. We are not satisfied with what we are. We feel trapped, and we flail about in our own way, longing to be free. We sense that we are born for a more spacious destiny.

It is Thomas who speaks for all of us when he says to Jesus, “Lord, we don’t know where we are going, how can we know the way?” (v.5) When Jesus says that he is the way, the truth, and the life, he is saying that he is not only the messenger, but he is also the message. He is both the shepherd and the path.

“I am the way,” says Jesus. He is the way through life’s hardness and harshness, its pain and penalties, its fears, and its failings. Jesus is the way to eternal life.

Jesus does not deny the reality of life. He says later in John’s Gospel, “In this world you will have trouble.” (Jn 16: 33) He is not telling us that if we follow him, we will be spared hardship. No one, not even Jesus, will prevent bad things from happening to good people. He is showing that we can cope with difficulty because we have a way out of it. He is the way and he is preparing our place for us.

There are modern day televangelists who twist the gospel into an unrecognizable form called the ‘prosperity gospel.’ They pretty up the Bible so to make it look like a health and wealth self-help book. This ‘new’ religion sells a message of avoiding the hardships of discipleship. They sanctify self-centeredness and greed as the path to fulfilled destiny. They callously ignore Jesus’ call to help the needy.

Brand any religion as false that says it can spare you the burdens and cares that are our lot in life. Brand any religion as false that claims it can make you avoid hard trials and great tribulations. It is far wiser to find out how to deal with these things than how to avoid them.

From the Lord, we receive a very different message. He recognizes life’s difficulties and shows us the way through them. He teaches us that how we treat others defines us as people and as his followers. He shows us that compassion; kindness, forgiveness, love, and peace are the way to be his followers and the way to eternal glory with him.

Jesus is the way out of what the secular world defines as human purpose and destiny. Wealth is not fulfillment. As much as it tugs at us, we know wealth is not fulfillment. Jesus is the way to fulfillment. Jesus shows us that we have august connections, a relationship to the eternal God, and that relationship is intimate and

abiding. We are the children of God and our destination is in the house of God, which is infinitely more splendid than the most rich of earthly homes. We are born for greater things than earthly comfort. We are heirs of God's glory. A person, who believes that to be true, walks the treacherous path in this life with surer footing and a deeper sense of purpose.

We are the children of God who steadily leads us onward and upward to a destiny so worthy and so wonderful that the eyes of people have not seen and the minds of people cannot imagine the final destination for us. Christ is the way!

If Jesus told us anything at all, he told us that this world is not all there is. We have dual citizenship. This we now know, for Christ taught and proclaimed that this present existence is but a narrow, cramped, path with many ruts and climbs. It cannot compare to what God has in store for us. Jesus gives us no details... as if to say that it is all too wonderful to submit to words.

He says that he is the way... the way home! He is the way to glory! He is the way to the sunlit shores of and everlasting life in the closer presence of God. Jesus is our Lord. All we need to do is follow him. AMEN