

Shawnee Presbyterian Church
May 10, 2020
Rev. Thomas Bartha
“The Way, the Truth, the Life”

On this Mother’s Day, in memory and in celebration we thank God for the nurture and loving care of mothers everywhere, and for all who have shown a mother’s love.

Call to Worship

From I Peter

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight. And like living stones, may we be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Grace, mercy and peace be yours in abundance, for God our Creator and Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

O Holy God, we confess how we have strayed from your path and turned to our own way. We believe Jesus to be the way and the truth and the life but when we take our eyes off him, we become lost in the maze of our own thinking and desires. Where that has happened, O Lord, grant us your grace and forgiveness, and strengthen us we pray, to walk in the way of Jesus our Savior...*moment for silent prayer and reflection*

Words of Assurance

From Romans 8:1-2:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and of death.”

“The Way, the Truth, the Life”

John 14:1-7

When parents go out for an evening, young children are apprehensive: “When will you be back? Where are you going? Who will stay with us?” As children grow older the questions change: “Say, isn’t it about time you go out again?” In this passage, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure: “I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, but where I am going you cannot come.” Each sentence raises their anxiety: “Lord, where are you going? What will we do next? Where do we turn?” Their questions give rise to some of the most comforting, and most astounding of Jesus’ teachings.

It is a confusing time for the disciples, toward the end of Jesus’ years on earth. Jesus patiently teaches that he is leaving, but, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.*” But their hearts are plenty troubled. They have Jesus right here with them. No need for him to leave. He continues: “*In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not*

so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also."

I have read these words at virtually every funeral or memorial service I have even led, and continue to find them profoundly comforting. They hold a peaceful certainty. *"And you know the way where I am going."* "We do?" Disciple Thomas voices the question they are all thinking: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" "I AM THE WAY," Jesus reassures them, "AND THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER BUT BY ME. If you know me, you will know my Father also." These are the words I want us to think upon for these next few minutes, and the claim they have upon our life. Jesus makes this claim out of a yearning love that seeks to call us back from any detours or dead ends, or thinking that we are responsible for earning our way into God's favor by our own goodness.

"I am the way." Notice that Jesus does not say, "Beliefs about me are the way to God, or, "Holding the right opinion about my teaching is the way to God." No. "I am the way." When we first moved to this area some years back, we got lost many a time. Early on, I took an exit off I-80, assuring Mary that I knew the way to Sunrise Drive. We ended up near downtown Stroudsburg, and asked several passersby: "Sunrise Drive? Mt. Nebo Road? Near the Price Chopper?" "Sorry." Eventually we found our way. But there have been wrong turns aplenty, including one this past winter, driving home from Warwick NY late one evening, in a remote area where our GPS could not find a signal. "Return to route," we heard over and over again, winding through abandoned dirt roads for nearly an hour. Oh, but then there was the gentleman who drove into our cul-de-sac. "Can you help me find my way back to Route 209?" "Oh, better than that!" I hopped into our car. "Follow me. I am the way to Rt. 209!"

Jesus taught that the true direction of life is toward the Maker of heaven and earth. Our highest destiny is to know God's love and to love God in response, to offer our lives in trusting commitment. Jesus is the way. We keep our eyes on him. What does the way look like? For one thing, it is unpredictable. We find Jesus in places or ways we do not expect. You can listen to a Brahms Requiem performed with eloquence by the finest symphony, or be involved in majestic worship that leaves you strangely unmoved. Yet a children's chorus of seven voices, or an elderly person offering prayer with a shaky voice, a teenager making profession of faith, someone walking into church after a long absence...these are the things that leave us breathless in God's wake. Small gestures of love and caring tug at our hearts these days.

Decisions you think are monumental turn out not to matter so much after all. But a chance encounter with a friend, or the most casually spoken statement becomes a moment of eternal significance. This is why Jesus Christ is endlessly fascinating—because we are forever discovering new ways he leads us, discovering new things about God, about ourselves.

Then, I am the truth. In Jesus Christ truth become present and visible. In the scriptures, truth means more than knowledge. The OT root of the word means “firmness”—something steadfast, immovable in a world of chaos and uncertainty. When applied to Jesus, “truth” has that sense of dependability, rock-solidness. Jesus is loyal, faithful. He will not say one thing today, and the totally opposite tomorrow. We see truth in how Jesus lives, how he interacts with others, his radical trust in God. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, trustworthy in whatever he says or does. We can safely place our trust in him. “Believe in God,” Jesus says. “Believe also in me. I am the truth.”

And then, I am the life...not the lifestyle. Life and lifestyle are two different things. Lifestyle is a carefully assembled blend of our preferences—our clothing, the books we read, our tastes in music and food, recreation—personal choices. A lifestyle is adjustable. A life, however, tends to be messier, harder to change. It involves all of who we are. Over recent weeks, we have seen the long lines waiting for food, unemployment, desperation, loved ones dying alone. You have watched the heartache, with yet more to come. Our hearts break over and over again for those whose lives have been compromised, upended. We cannot make sense out of any of this. As we emerge toward some sense of normalcy, life is being rearranged. Not yet certain exactly how it will look. But you can be very certain Jesus is at heart and center—to guide, provide strength and hope. He is a companion in the thick of it.

So, on the final evening of Jesus’ life, gathered with those closest to him, Jesus makes this remarkable claim: *I am the life, and the way and the truth*. Not life with a pinch of religion thrown in. But life in which every facet is an arena for God’s saving grace. God grants you and I the ability to offer some portion of Christ’s love and comfort and hope to another who stands in need. I like so much this quote from George Elliot: “What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other.”

Shortly after speaking these words Jesus gave himself up to be crucified. “I am the way,” he said, but when he died it seemed there was no way at all. “I am the truth.” But it appeared that lies had conquered and destroyed him. And how could he be life if death had finished him off? But the Cross and the empty tomb summon us forward. If all that preachers of the Gospel had to offer were words we cooked up for the occasion, you would have wearied of it all long ago. But to take Jesus’ words, and hopefully convey them in a manner that grips and guides, is something to which I gladly commit my life. This passage is bedrock, the foundation upon which our faith rests. So, to all who search for security, peace, hope and assurance, for a home with God in this world and the next, I point you to Jesus the Way, the Truth, the Life—to place your life into his hands, allow him to work through you, and know that he is with you always. Thank-you, Lord Jesus, for the truth, beauty and power of your words, and for your love that knows no limits. Amen.

Benediction:

May the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift his countenance upon you and grant you peace. Now and always. Amen.