

John 14:1-14

“Knowing the Way, Claiming the Truth, Living the Life”

May 26, 2019

This morning we are continuing our sermon series on the “I am...” sayings of Jesus. We began with “I am the good shepherd” and “I am the gate for the sheep”. Last week, Larry and I tag teamed on “I am the resurrection and the life” and “I am the light of the world”. And today I am going to look at one of the most familiar of the “I am...” sayings “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

Everytime I hear those words of Jesus, I am reminded of a VBS song from at least 20 years ago. It was based on this conversation between Jesus and Thomas and the chorus was literally the verse we are considering today “I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me” repeated several times. Like many songs written for VBS it was catchy. So catchy in fact that to this day I can’t read those words without singing that song in my head. I looked all over for the CD so that I could play it for you but I couldn’t find it. The best I could do was find a Youtube video of 3 people doing some kind of interpretive liturgical dance to it. It was pretty entertaining, if not a little bit odd. If you want to see it when you get home, just search for a song called “Thomas Asked the Lord”

Anyway, that is what we are looking at this morning, the time when Thomas asked the Lord where he was going, because they wanted to go with him but didn’t know where he was going so they couldn’t know the way. Before we get to Jesus’ “I am...” response, it is important for us to look at the context of their conversation. It takes place on the most significant night of Jesus life and ministry, the night that he gathered with his disciples to share one final meal with them, one final Passover feast, before he knew he would be arrested and crucified and died and buried, sitting with them at the table that night, Jesus knew he would be going away from them.

It is true that in John's gospel that he doesn't include Jesus actually sharing that meal with them. He mentions that things happen during "supper" but he doesn't include Jesus taking the bread and giving to them and telling them it is his body, or his taking the cup and telling them that it is his blood. That doesn't mean that John didn't believe it happened or that he felt it wasn't important. Remember that John was writing his gospel after Mark, and Matthew, and Luke had written theirs. He would often leave out things that the other three had already written about and would include things that they had left out. At that "last supper" John chronicles how Jesus got up from the table and washed his disciples feet, how he literally took on the role of a servant. Jesus tells his disciples that they should do the same.

Following that, and the foretelling of Judas' betrayal of him, Jesus tells the disciples that he will only be with them a little longer and he gives them a new commandment *"...that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* Peter questions where Jesus is going and vows to follow him anyway and that he will even lay down his life for him. Jesus responds by telling Peter that before the sun rises, he will deny knowing Jesus three times. It was a night filled with drama and tension and confusion.

Jesus tries to comfort them, to let them not to worry, not to be afraid. *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2 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? 3 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. 4 And you know the way to the place where I am going."* But I'm not sure how comforting that his words are. They actually seem to create more confusion. As we see in Thomas' response.

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Putting Thomas' confusion into my own words would sound like this- "Lord, we don't understand anything that you are saying. And you telling us that you are going away doesn't help at all. We don't know where you are going and we certainly don't know the way to a place that we don't know and have never been." The rest of John 14 and on through chapters 15, 16, 17 are Jesus helping them to understand the hows and the whys of how everything is going to be ok for them, even though he won't be with them, at least not physically. Taken together, this section of John is known as the Farewell Discourse. In it Jesus explains what is going to happen to them in the days, months, and even years to come.

When Jesus tells them (and us) that he is the way, the truth, and the life, he is assuring us that even though he is not with us physically, he is still "with us". He is still doing what we need him to do. He is helping us to know the way to God, to claim the truth of our salvation through him, and to live the life that we are called to live as the people that God has created and called us to be. I want to take a closer look at what it means to know the way, to claim the truth, and to live the life.

Jesus is the way. Jesus is the way to God. Not just the way to eternal life in heaven when we die, but Jesus is the way to come to God here and now, in this life and on this earth. Before Jesus, the way to God- both in heaven and on earth- was through the Law. God gave the OT Law to his people to make them holy, to set them apart from those who were not part of the covenant, to bring them into relationship with him. All you had to do to find your way to God was follow the Law, all 613 of them. Before Jesus, this was the way to God.

But it proved impossible. No matter how good, how pious, how devout, how righteous a person was, they could not follow ALL of the Law. People were (and are) bound to slip up and violate one of the 613 commandments of the Law. It is hard enough for some people to even follow the Top Ten, the Ten Commandments, let alone to follow all 613 without error, without a mistake, without overlooking at least one, if not many of them. Yet before Jesus, this was what it took to come into relationship with God, this was “the way.”

God saw that it was impossible. God saw that no matter how hard they tried, his people were going to come up short. So God found a new way. Instead of relying on his people to come to him through adherence to the Law, he came to us in Jesus. (REPEAT) The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And he showed us a new way to God. A way of love and grace and forgiveness.

This is what Jesus was talking about on that same night that he said “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Remember that just before that, after he washed his disciples feet, he gave them a NEW commandment “...*that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” The new way to God that is made known in Jesus is encapsulated in this commandment.

The love with which Jesus loves his disciples, the love with which he loves us, the love that he commands us to have for one another, is a self denying, self sacrificing, all encompassing love. It is a love that is patient and kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It is a love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. It is a love that never ends.

The way to God that is Jesus Christ is the way of love. To know the way means to know love. It means to know that God loves us so much that he gave us his only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life. And that we are called to love one another with that same love. As John wrote in his first letter *Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.* When Jesus says that he is “the way” this is what he is talking about. Knowing this means that we know the way to God.

Jesus is the truth. Understanding this one is a bit tougher than understanding what it means to know that Jesus is the way. Though it seems contradictory and illogical to say, truth is hard to define. As Pontius Pilate asked Jesus “What is truth?” In our society and culture, truth is fluid and changing. Even though truth should be an absolute, it’s not. We live in a world where what is true for one person is not true for another. And, of course, that makes it even harder to answer Pilate’s question “what is truth?”

Thankfully, the one absolute truth that we have is Jesus. It is true that Jesus is the word made flesh, that he is fully human and fully divine. It is true that he came into the world to show us the way to the Father. It is true that he died on the cross for us and for our salvation. This is what Jesus means when he says “I am the truth.” He is the truth of faith, the truth of hope, the truth of love. He is the absolute, unending and eternal truth. When we claim Jesus as the truth, we are claiming him to be our Lord, to be our God, to be our salvation.

The truth that is Jesus is not something that is only to be claimed. It is also something that is to be proclaimed. When we claim the truth of Jesus, then we proclaim it to all the world. In word and in deed, we proclaim our faith, we provide hope, and we live our love.

And Jesus is the life. It is interesting that Jesus makes this claim on the very night he was betrayed, he made it to his disciples who would watch him die the very next day. Yet here he is, telling them that he is THE life. I wonder if, in the middle of all the upheaval of his arrest and trial and crucifixion and death, I wonder if they remembered what he said. I wonder if they remembered and felt their hopes dashed, and thought that Jesus' words were nothing more than empty promises. And I wonder if they also remembered them as they saw him, three days later, risen from the dead and alive again. I wonder if they remembered and believed.

But the life that is Jesus is more than eternal life, a life that we will only experience after we die. It is also a life that we live here and now, each and every day. As he said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Jesus came that WE may have life and have it abundantly. Life with Jesus is abundant life. It is life lived without fear, because the only thing we have to fear is death and Jesus has already defeated death. It is life lived with grace and mercy and forgiveness, because we have been recipients of Jesus' grace and mercy and forgiveness. Living the life that is Jesus is living our life as Jesus lived his life. It is literally doing what Jesus would do.

Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." When we are his followers, then we know the way, we claim the truth, and we live the life. Let us follow the way that is Jesus, let us claim him as our Lord, and let us live the life that he gives us as we strive to live like Jesus, to love like Jesus, and to serve like Jesus. For he is our way, he is our truth and he is our life.

Amen

