

John 14:1-14

WAY TO GO!

Several weeks ago, I began an Address by asking what is an invention which has had a great impact on our human lives over many years. Things I had come up with were the wheel, internal combustion engine, electricity, the internet. Somebody that day suggested one that I hadn't thought of, but which is very worthy of being on that list, and that is the written word. It is a great, and very significant, part of our lives, isn't it? The written word enables us to accurately record events and stories, to convey ideas, pass on information, as well as to entertain.

But as good as it is, the written word does at times have its drawbacks in how we use it. A part of how we communicate with people verbally is that, without even consciously thinking about it, the speaker picks up on the mood, body language, responses, of the person they are speaking too, and delivers their message in response to these cues of where their audience is at. The listener in turn, picks up on the speaker's body language, spoken tone, facial expression, and uses both those things and the spoken words to interpret and understand the message which is being given. Normally the written word is great for recording and passing on information, but sometimes, taking away all those other cues which are a part of the spoken message, it can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. In my years in schools I had a number of occasions when I was called on to act as a mediator between staff members who had a falling out which began over email. A simple email sent out with a message like, 'Everyone please clean up your dishes after using them', would be taken the wrong way by one person, who maybe was having a bad day which the email sender didn't know about, or for some reason took the message as a personal attack, or just let their own confirmation bias come into play, and it was on. You may remember that when I first came here, I said I want to be open and approachable to you all, and shared my adage that, 'email is for information, talking is for communication.' If you want to let me know something, please do email. If you want to discuss something or give me any feedback, please talk to me so we can clearly work through it together and not finish up with a misunderstanding. The written word is great, but it can at times be easily misinterpreted.

This can even happen with what I will biasedly call the ultimate written word, the Bible. It is very easy to find examples of Christians using the same Bible text or account to come up with two opposing interpretations. This can, and does, happen with the statement of Jesus which is at the centre of our reading for today , “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (6) As a statement, when we look at it or hear it, just by itself, how can we take it? It has, and is, unfortunately, sometimes seen as a threat or a word of judgment: you are with Jesus or you are history! Christians at times use it as a threat to try to scare people towards ‘giving themselves’ to Jesus so they can be saved. But if we look at it in the wider context of not just this reading, but Jesus’ message, and the whole Bible, that’s not how we are to receive this message. This is one of seven ‘I am ...’ statements Jesus makes in John’s Gospel, beside ‘I am the Good Shepherd’, ‘the Bread of Life’, ‘ the Door’, ‘the Resurrection and the Life’, etc. Those statements, along with this one, show us who Jesus is, and His role as a part of God’s plan to save all people. This ‘I am ...’ statement, like the others, isn’t meant to give a way to include some people and exclude others, or to threaten people towards God, or even as a way to put ourselves above others, but they are words of promise, of comfort, of assurance, that Jesus has come for everyone.

“I am the way and the truth and the life.” I am sure this is one of the best known of John’s ‘I am...’ sayings. Let’s break each part of that down and hear the message Jesus has for us here.

‘I am the way’, Jesus says. Taking that in the context that the Bible is the story of God’s love and grace for us, and knowing from many parts of the Bible that Jesus came to bring that love and grace into the world, what do you read or hear in those words? It is a claim by Jesus that He is God’s plan to bring all people back to God. It tells us very clearly, again like many other parts of the Bible, that we are saved in no way by what we do, but only by what God through Jesus has done for us. It’s as simple as that; faith in Jesus is the way we come back to God. In some older churches where the pulpit was set up high so that the preacher looked down upon the congregation, it was sometimes written in a place where the pastor would see upon first stepping into the pulpit, ‘We want to see Jesus.’ It was the people’s way of reminding the pastor not to bring them any other theories or fancy concepts, but that only faith in Jesus would save them. Jesus is the way of our being saved.

When we look at bit further down in this reading, we see that Jesus is also the way in another sense; He is the way for us to now live. Jesus says a bit further down here, ‘whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing’, and He promises us God’s blessings on those things. Again, taking this as part of the overall message, this is not a threat, or a condition, it is a call. When we know the Way, we walk the way. Knowing God’s love for us in Jesus, we share God’s love for us in Jesus. Before followers of Jesus were called ‘Christians’ we were called ‘People of the Way’ – linked directly to this reading. This first pops up in Act 9:2 where it is used by Saul persecutor of the Church, before he became Paul great missionary of the Church. It is used a number of other times in Acts, and also fits in with the Old Testament teaching that God’s people walk God’s path. I’ve often thought that ‘The Way’ would be a great name for a congregation; The Way Lutheran Church. We are people of the Way; people who belong to God because of the One who is the Way, Jesus, and people who go His way by living in and responding to His love for us. We know the Way, and we go the way.

And Jesus is the Truth. We know who God is through Jesus. As Jesus cried at the death of His friend Lazarus, had pity on the crowds who were hungry, with care and compassion healed the sick, in power cast out demons, in anger turned on those who were teaching the wrong thing about God, and in love and obedience gave up His life for us, in all of these things Jesus shows us who God is, and most importantly, who God is to us. As Jesus says here, when we see Him we see the Father, and that gives us comfort and strength in knowing who God is for us. The Truth we see in Jesus is that God loves us, that God is willing to do anything He can to restore our relationship with Him, and that the Way is there for all who turn to Him in faith.

And Jesus is The Life. Last week, Good Shepherd Sunday, we mentioned that Psalm 23 is by far the most commonly used Psalm in funeral services. The first half of our reading today, John 14:1-6, is the most commonly used Gospel reading at funerals. And no wonder. At a time of loss and grieving this reading give us comfort and assurance of the eternal life prepared for us in heaven. Jesus is the Life because that new life is guaranteed for us through Him.

Even more than that, though, Jesus is the new life for us right now. The first verse here says so much about what our faith means to us in our lives now; ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.’ (1) The cure for heart-trouble is heart-trust. Jesus gives us new life not just in the life to come, but also right now. It is knowing God through Jesus that we know we have His love, His care, His strength and His guidance in whatever we go through. God does, through His Word, literally gives us a signpost of the way to living a full life by following Him, showing us how to live out our relationship with Him, how to treat others, how to view the things of this world. He also gives us comfort through this same Word in knowing that He is always with us, that we can rely on His love, that while we will have the tough times He will help us go through them. Looking to Jesus we have new life with God now, and forever.

Jesus is the Way to Go! And Jesus gives us the Way to Go! Jesus’ claim here is not a threat or a judgment, but they are words of love, of comfort, of assurance, and of promise. As people of The Way, because that’s what your faith in Him makes you, may you know and follow the Way that brings you to God, know the Truth which is God’s love in your life, and both live in now and look forward to forever the Life He has now given you. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

➤ Have you ever been involved in a misunderstanding which resulted from a written message, text, email, etc, being taken the wrong way, or seen it happen with others? What did this teach you about communicating only by written messages?

Think about the three claims Jesus makes here, and what they mean to you in your life:

- Jesus is The Way – the way for us to come back to God, the way to be saved, the way to both live in and share God’s love. How do you experience the truth of this claim in your life? What difference does it make to you in your life? What difference does it make to how you are called to live your life?
- Jesus is The Truth – in knowing Jesus we know God; His love, His faithfulness, His strength, His call to each one of us. How do you experience the truth of this claim in your life? What difference does it make to you in your life? What difference does it make to how you are called to live your life?
- Jesus is The Life – through Jesus we have new life lived in His love right now, and the promise and assurance of new life with Him forever. How do you experience the truth of this claim in your life? What difference does it make to you in your life? What difference does it make to how you are called to live your life?

Pray: thank God that in Jesus He has come to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life for us. Ask Him to help us to both know and live out these three great truths in our lives each day.

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