

Sermon - Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life

Jn 14:1-14

Many of us will associate today's gospel reading with funerals. And indeed, it is very relevant for a funeral service. But it is as relevant for our present life, if not even more so. The central focus of this passage is not so much on Jesus, as it is on God the Father. I counted 14 times that the word 'Father' appears in these 14 verses. The best-known verse in this passage is, of course, v6, where Jesus says, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'. Even though Jesus makes reference to Himself, that verse says as much about the Father as it does about Jesus – maybe more so.

'I am the Way' says Jesus. The Way where? The Way to the Father. 'I am the Truth'. The truth about whom – about the Father. And 'the life'. What life? Life in relationship with the Father. Firstly, 'I am the Way – the Way to the Father. No one comes to the Father but by Me.' It is through Jesus that we come to know God as our Father and ourselves as His children. In the first chapter of John we read, 'To those who received Jesus, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.' Through believing in Jesus and receiving Him into our lives we come to know God as our Father.

But more than just pointing the way to the Father, Jesus **is** Himself the way. Every other religion says in effect, 'This is the way; follow it'. Jesus says, 'I am the way, follow me'. In one of the language groups in South Africa a signpost is sometimes referred as a 'minister'. The reason is that, like some church ministers, the signpost shows the way but doesn't go there itself'. Not so with Jesus. In some supermarkets, if you ask an assistant where a certain item they might say, 'I think it's in aisle 7, about two-thirds of the way along, on about the fourth shelf.' And you set off, not very confident about locating the item. On other occasions the assistant says, 'Come with me, I'll show you where it is.' Such a difference. Jesus not only shows us the way, He is the Way.

Before Jesus, access to God was limited to the High Priest. Only he could go through the curtain in front of Holy of Holies, where God's presence was believed to be. And then only once in the year, on the Day of Atonement. The gospels tell us that when Jesus was crucified that curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom. Why top to bottom? Because it was God who opened up the way, not a human being. The way into the very presence of God was now open to all, because of the death of Jesus.

In the spectrum of the different faiths Jesus is unique: Only He claimed to be God in the flesh; only He offers the remedy for human sin; only He came back from the grave; only He offers to come and live within His followers. The late Dallas Willard, a renowned Christian author and speaker, spent most of his working life teaching philosophy in a secular university. One day a student asked him, 'Why do you refer so much to Jesus Christ? He replied with a question of his own, 'Who else do you have in mind?' Who else is there? Socrates, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Gandhi? Significant personalities, yes, but none of them comes even close to Jesus. 'I am the way', said Jesus, 'the way to the Father.'

Then secondly, Jesus says, 'I am the truth.' Jesus is the truth about God the Father. He says, 'Now that you know Me, you will know My Father also...I am in the Father and the Father is in me.' Paul writes to the Colossians, 'Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God.' As some child put it, 'Jesus is God with skin on'. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. Is God loving? Look at Jesus. Is God forgiving? Look at Jesus. Is God approachable? Look at Jesus. Is God peace-loving? Look at Jesus. Is God kind? Good? Faithful? Trustworthy? Generous? Look at Jesus. If we have any view of God that does not square with the life of Jesus, it cannot be a correct view, even if the Old Testament seems to be saying it. The late Archbishop Michael Ramsey liked to say, 'God is Christlike and in Him there is no unChristlikeness at all.'

One of the most important secrets to a healthy Christian faith is to have a correct view of God. If we believe, for example, that God is distant, or that God is vengeful, or that God favours some people over others, or that suffering is God's idea, or that any are beyond God's saving grace... then our view of God is flawed and we are unlikely to be able to enter into an intimate, healthy and fulfilling relationship with Him. 'I am the Truth' said Jesus', the Truth about God the Father.

And finally, Jesus says, 'I am the Life. It echoes two of the other 'I am' statements of Jesus, 'I am the Bread of Life' and 'I am the Resurrection and the Life'. It echoes also the words of John in Ch 1, 'In Him was life, and that life was the light of humankind.' Jesus offers fulness of life. The Bible talks about 'eternal life'. We tend to think of eternal life in terms of quantity, length of life – life that is everlasting. That is part of it. But the real meaning is about quality more than quantity. Eternal life is a certain quality of life. It is life lived in intimate relationship with the eternal God. It is life in which we operate, not just on a physical level, but also on a spiritual level. It is a life which we live within the world around us, but also within the One who created this world. It is a life in which we acknowledge that 'In Him we live and move and have our being.' It is a life where we see ourselves, not primarily as bodies that happen to have a soul, but as eternal souls who happen to have a body.

So eternal life can begin now, in this world. And, of course, it continues into the next world - the world where that relationship with our heavenly Father is even closer and deeper. Jesus makes reference to this in Jn 14. He speaks of going to prepare a place for us in His Father's house. Jesus uses the imager of one of the customs of that day. Where a bride and bridegroom became betrothed to each other, the man would go off to add another section to his father's house. When the building was complete, he would return to his bride and take her to live with him in his father's house. Jesus said, 'In My Father's house are many rooms'. Jesus is that bridegroom and we are his bride. He has gone to prepare that place for us, and He will come back to fetch us so that where He is, we may be also. He wants us to part of the wedding banquet prepared for all God's people. The party of all parties. You and I are invited. Let's not turn down our invitation!

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life said Jesus – the Way to the Father, the Truth about the Father and the one who makes possible Life in relationship with the Father.