

# Sermon

*Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2009*

## **I am the Way the Truth and the Life**

*John 14:1-14*

Throughout the summer we have been looking at the 'I am' sayings of Jesus,  
And we have seen how each time Jesus begins with I am,  
We see something revealed of the character of God,  
We see something more intimate about what God is like,  
So today we turn our attention to one of the greatest and most controversial of those sayings  
"I am the way and the truth and the life."

When that passage was read today in Church,  
What phrase stood out in your mind?  
What part of the story struck you most deeply?

Personally for me it wasn't the 'I am' saying!  
Rather it was Thomas and his question.

Thomas is one of the disciples who is so often derided,  
Derided because of his lack of faith,  
Mostly because of his disbelief in the resurrection,  
But also because of his disbelief at other times in the gospel story such as here.  
So derided is Thomas is that his name is now used to chide a person in our culture today,  
We call them a doubting Thomas.  
And I think that Thomas gets a bad press!

Instead of being a doubt,  
I think Thomas is honest and brave enough to speak his mind.

He asks the question all the rest of the disciples are thinking but too afraid to boast,  
Where is Jesus going?  
How are we supposed to follow him?

Thomas just comes right and asks it,  
And because he does,  
We are given this wonderful picture of God,  
In Jesus response,  
I am the way the truth and the life,  
If Thomas had not asked – how would they have known.

Sometimes we are afraid as Christians to admit that we have doubts,  
Sometimes we are afraid to admit there are just some bits of the Gospel that we are not so sure  
about,  
That there are some aspects of the faith that leave us a little confused.  
For to admit such a thing would be to show weakness,  
To admit such a thing would make us somehow a lesser Christian.

Well I can stand here today and tell that I have doubts about the faith,  
And doubts about my faith all the time,  
There are so many areas that confuse me,

That I wonder is it really so?  
Is there really life after death,  
Is God really with me all the time?  
Am I really forgiven for that sin?

Doubt is a vital part of our faith,  
Doubt proves that our faith is alive,  
Doubt proves that we are thinking about faith,  
Doubt becomes the ground from which we grow in faith,  
Because only as we wrestle with our doubts,  
Only as we ask our questions,  
Only as we struggle with the meaning of our faith in everyday life,  
Will we find answers,  
Only when we deal with doubt can we deepen our experience of God.

So never be afraid of doubt,  
Never run away from doubting,  
Rather face your doubts and learn from them.  
Like Thomas as you deal with doubt,  
As you ask the questions you just might receive the most wonderful of answers!

So Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life,  
What does he mean.

I suppose the first thing to ask is,  
The way to where?

Well he answers that in the first few verses of our reading,  
He is the way to 'my father's house',  
He is the way to heaven,  
He is the way to God,  
The way to the side of the great God who created us and loves us,  
That's where the way ends,  
At God's side,  
In God company.

Jesus is elsewhere in the New Testament called the forerunner of our faith,  
That word forerunner is a translation of the Greek word *prodromos*  
In the port of Alexandria and other great ports of the day,  
The whole economy was built around trade that came from the great ships which navigated the  
seas.  
Some of those ports were difficult to enter for those ships,  
Especially if the crew did not know the proper channels,  
So a pilot boat was used,  
Much the same as a pilot boat is still used in ports today,  
To go out and meet the ships,  
And go ahead of them to make sure that the way was clear,  
To lead them safely into the port,  
The name for that boat was *prodromos*,  
Forerunner,  
The same word used of Jesus,

He is the way,  
The one who goes ahead of us into the father's hand,  
The one who leads us to God.

In the Old testament 'the way' was often used of the people's relationship with God,  
Thus the psalmist declared, "Show me your way Oh Lord",  
Isaiah the prophet said, "This is the way of the Lord walk in it"  
That is just a few there are many more.

But what emerged was a clear understanding that there was a way to please God,  
That way was a moral code,  
Do what is right,  
Love the Lord,  
Keep his commandments,  
Follow the law,  
A way to get to God.

But what Jesus does is take that idea and radically reshape it.

Yes there is a way to God,  
But it isn't about what you do,  
It isn't about how well you follow some code,  
It isn't about how good you are at the practice of your faith,  
It isn't about how often you come to church,  
It isn't about how many boards and committees you serve on,  
It isn't about how much you own,  
Or how you use your wealth,  
It isn't about any code or set of practices,  
Jesus takes all that legalism away from our interaction with God,  
And instead says,  
"I am the way,  
Me, Jesus.  
It is your relationship with me that matters"  
It is what you do with Christ in your life that makes all the difference,  
It is your friendship with him,  
It is your closeness to him,  
It is the depth of your commitment and love for him,  
That is the way!

The truth is this.  
In Christ and in Christ alone do we see what God is like  
Christ is the word of God become flesh.  
We discover God not as a some serene and distant an untouchable deity in the sky,  
Remote from feelings and isolated from the reality of life and the hardship of love.  
The truth is that is not what God is like,  
In Christ we see the God who becomes one of us,  
We see the God who is part of a human family,  
Who knows what it is to work for a living,  
Who experiences the hardships of life,  
We see the God who knows the temptations we face,  
The hurt we encounter in relationships with others,  
The joy of the love of friends and family,

The pain of the rejection by those you care for most.

Willie Barclay describes that truth well in these words:

“... in Jesus we see God caring intensely, yearning over humanity, feeling for them and with them, loving them until God bears their wounds upon his heart ... [Jesus] brought God’s accent, God’s message, God’s mind and God’s heart to men and women”

What is life?

Is it merely the days we have on this earth?

Is it merely the things we do in our allotted time on this earth?

It is so much more,

In Jesus,

In relationship with him,

We find life,

Life as it was created to be,

Life that brings joy and meaning and purpose,

We find out who we are in the sight of God.

We see what it means to be God’s children,

We hear God’s call on our lives,

In Christ we have the life that burns with hope,

In Christ we have life that is so much more than merely existing from day to day,

It is life that is going somewhere,

It is life that is leading to God,

It is life that is full of something,

Full of the love of God,

It is life with capital letters!

Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life.

I said at the start that this is one of the most controversial of all the I am saying,  
Because for all the wonderful hope and promise and joy and power that it conveys,  
The church has struggled with these words.

People are uncomfortable saying that Jesus is the only way to God,  
What about all the other world religions,  
What about all the other devout and loyal followers of those faiths,  
Don’t all religions ultimately lead to the same place,  
Don’t they all have some element of the truth in them?

That sounds wonderfully fair and democratic!

But the fact is that all the world’s religions are not the same,  
And they do not all lead to the same place.

Jesus very clearly said I am the way the truth and the life,  
His message was certain,  
Only in relationship with him,  
Do we find the purpose to be,  
Only he can lead us to God without shame and fear.

To say anything else is to deny him,  
To deny the heart of our church and our faith,  
And as church and as individual Christians we need to have the courage to live our faith,

To live that faith boldly and honestly and openly in the world around us,  
To live in relationship with Christ.  
To live the truth of the God who understands,  
The God who is with us,  
The God who has been where we are,  
And felt what we feel.

He is the only way to life,  
The only way to God's side,  
The only way to the father's house  
The only way to peace.

Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life.

Follow him,  
And know God's love,  
God's peace,  
Burning in your life,  
Bringing you meaning even in the darkest of times,  
Hope even in the gloom of despair,  
And joy which nothing can extinguish.

Follow him.

Amen