

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

5 Easter, Year A

May 22, 2011: Rev Judi Sato

John 14:1-14 "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

I was at a retreat awhile back when the leader had us write down the answer to this question – "who are you?" Well, I'm Judi. What else? Wife, mother, Christian. What else? Child of Bess and Tom. What else, etc. etc. until we came up with 100 answers. That is not as easy as it seems.

If I were to ask you who is Jesus – how would you respond? Maybe words like: Son of God, human, second part of the Trinity, prophet, friend of the outcast, baby, God incarnate, sacrificial lamb, judge, alive – here and now, healer, compassionate, peacemaker, Lord, savior, missionary, teacher, rabbi, passionate, purpose driven, brother, friend, servant, etc....

So I guess it is rather obvious that I want to talk about Jesus. There are a couple of reasons. Besides the fact we are a Christian church and we should know about Him, the core purpose for St. Stephen's is to make a place that draws all people to **Christ**. Yesterday I was at a Deanery meeting where the diocese presented their draft strategic plan. This included presenting what they consider the values under which this diocese uses to guide their decisions and actions. Their number one value – **Christ-Centeredness**. So I think it's important to take a moment and focus on Him because focusing on Jesus is the spiritual milk that Peter talks about in the reading today. And a good place to start is in today's gospel with the well known passage about Jesus: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

This passage is in the 14th chapter of John, so let me give you some context. Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples, which began in chapter 13. They are still in that upper room where they are sharing their last intimate moments together. After he had washed their feet and eaten with the twelve, Jesus foretold his betrayal by Judas (13:26-28) and his betrayal by the loyal Peter (13:37-38). He has commanded his disciples to love each other (13:34) even as he predicts his own departure. They are confused. They want to go with him but they don't know the way. The disciples are looking for a path or a way of life, seven habits, nine steps, or Ten Commandments to help them, but instead....Jesus instead says.... "I am the way, the truth, and the life".

Let's unpack this passage.

Jesus is "The Way"

The Way is the most compelling name for understanding who Jesus is and what Jesus means for our lives. Jesus is both the destination and also is the road by which we travel to the destination. Jesus as The Way is both the realization and the promise; and the means and the goal.

Proclaiming Jesus as the Way forces us to be both aware of the quality of our relationship with Jesus, as well as our continued openness to Him in the world. One of the great pitfalls in Christianity is to presume that once we have had our personal experience of Jesus that we no longer have to be on the lookout for Jesus as the Way.

We could sit back and coast, assured of our own redemption and connection with God. And some do just that. But Jesus as the Way does not allow that. The word “way” is an action word – we are drawn and called back to Jesus over and over; all the more aware of Christ’s presence in our lives, in the world, and in others.

An example of knowing Jesus as “The Way” is when I was in seminary. I was going through the ordination process and I kept hitting walls. I wanted to withdraw and every time that would happen, Jesus would draw me back in to himself – through a song, a word, or a book; reminding me that He is my way, not the road to ordination. I was obedient and the rest is history.

“The Truth”

Truth in the first century is not the scientific or investigative proof-testing we have today. The bible wasn’t written to be exact. The bible was written to tell a story – the story of God’s love for creation, especially you and I, all culminating in Jesus, God’s son. There are many who believe science and religion are incompatible and there is this battle over which one has the truth. Stephen Hawkins comes to mind. But science is slowly moving to look at areas that are not quite so cut and dry – they are looking at the aesthetics of beauty, comfort, and love. When scientists use one of these – say pleasure – as a variable in their experiments, they are getting very good results. Did you know that rats like to have their tummies rubbed. Not a normal behavior you see rats seeking out in their natural habitats. But when put in a maze and presented with the choice of selecting food or a hand to rub their tummies – the rats selected the hand every time.

Truth is not so black and white. It’s not a doctrine or a formula. Jesus says, “I am the truth,” and he means that in Him the true, the genuine, the ultimate reality is present. Jesus is not the truth because His teachings are true. But His teachings are true because they express the truth which He Himself is. He is more than His words. And He is more than any word said about Him. The truth which makes us free is neither the teaching of Jesus nor the teaching about Jesus, it is Jesus himself.

Stephen, in our first reading in Acts today, is an example of someone who knew Jesus as truth as his reality. It was a truth so strong all Stephen saw while he was being stoned was Jesus sitting in heaven at the right hand of God. Jesus is truth for the missionaries in non-Christian friendly countries, like China or the Middle East. Jesus is the truth for many people who are going through hard times.

“The Life”

Throughout the gospels Jesus has been telling his disciples all along who he was. Particular to John’s gospel are these famous “I AM” statements. There are seven of them:

- I am the Bread of Life (6:35)
- I am the Light of the World (8:12)
- I am the gate (10:7)
- I am the shepherd (10:11)
- I am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
- I am the Vine
- I am the way, the truth, and the life

These are all ways that speak of life.

- As the bread of life – he is our sustenance
- As the light of the world – he is our light
- As the gate – he is our door to knowing God
- As the shepherd – he is our caretaker
- As the resurrection – he is the source of eternal life
- As the vine – he is our support

These are all about life – they are all Jesus. Jesus is the life.

I have a friend in Oregon named Carol. She is a single mom with three boys, living from paycheck to paycheck. But Carol knew Jesus was her life and she could not just sit back and watch others suffer. She started taking left over bread out to the migrant camps. She saw a wealth of need out there. So the next week, she took out clothing and more food. She started going every week. After awhile, she had some friends who helped. She was able to get a pick-up truck and loaded it up every week. She did this all the while facing health issues, children issues, and she never ever complained – Jesus was her sustenance, her caretaker, her support,...her life.

The disciples tried to pin Jesus down – where do we go, how do we know the father? Jesus tells them – it’s not a where or a how – it’s a ‘who’, and I am the ‘who.’ He has been with them for three years. They have seen God. They have touched God. They have eaten with God. They have worshipped and prayed with God. They know God. They know the way, the truth and the life. It came out of their relationship forged over those three years.

In the beginning when I asked you who is “Jesus” your responses had to come out of your relationship with him. So pursue Jesus in all you do – at work, at home, in church and in service to others so you can answer the questions:

- How is Jesus your way?
- How is Jesus your truth?
- How is Jesus your life?

So maybe next time I ask the question “who is Jesus”, we’ll come up with way more than 100 words. *Amen.*