

Way, Truth, Life

Acts 7:55-60; John 14:1-14

The words from John's Gospel that we heard earlier have become so very familiar. Used at funerals, they are right up there with the singing of Psalm 23, The Lord's my Shepherd. We often forget the context in which Jesus spoke them. In John's gospel Jesus is in the upper room with His closest followers. He has washed their feet, on His knees before them with a bowl of water. He has seated Himself at a long simple table and shared with them bread and wine, His Last Supper, and told them about His self-sacrifice which is to come. He has watched Judas Iscariot leave the room, to go out and betray Him. He has told the disciples the new commandment, to love one another, as He, Jesus, has loved them.

And having said all of this, to confused, troubled, uncertain, perhaps even frightened people, He says:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am, you may be also...I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me."

In today's world where many people young and old alike are seeking for a spirituality that will give meaning to their lives and bring them some sense of inner purpose and some sense of an awareness of Who God is and what God is like. This passage, I think the only one where Jesus gives any detail about heaven, is there to comfort us. In that description of heaven, there is no mention of the interior décor, or fluffy clouds, or angels ascending and descending, or pearly gates. Just a house, with many rooms, and a place prepared for us. For you. For me. This roominess of God.

Read at funerals for centuries, this passage is given by Jesus at the edge of His own grave. Jesus tells us that death is not the end, but the beginning of the way whose destination is the room He is making for us with God. No more detail than that. We are guests, friends, beloved sisters and brothers, and Jesus is welcoming us home. Into His home, God's home, with room to spare, and all are welcome. In a divided, fractious world, with little to unify, much to frighten, more to dismay, this great invitation and offer from Jesus reaches out again and again. Not deserved, not earned, just there. To give us not only confidence at the point of death, but to give us confidence throughout life. When least expected, His words. "Do not let your hearts be trouble....Believe....believe...."

Not for all a straightforward acceptance, I know. So much from what the Church has been in the past, and the way faith has been used and abused in the past can get in the way. But beyond it, above it, around it – the great hand of invitation and welcome. Words of challenge may be, but words of comfort also. The place is prepared. The room is ready. And should we doubt or lose the way, Jesus Himself will come again to lead and to guide. To help us over the threshold.

It is breath-taking.

What might it be like to have an untroubled heart? Jesus says, "Believe." To believe is to have God, even if we only hold on to God by our fingertips. But what it means to have God is that God is what you hang your heart upon.ⁱ The world offers many attempted comforts to soothe the troubled heart, but Jesus says, Hang your hearts on God; hang your hearts on Me. Follow Me, come the way I invite you, says Jesus.

Honest Thomas, practical Thomas has a legitimate question. "We don't know where you are going, how can we know the way?"

Jesus' response? "I am the way, and the truth, and the life..."

Jesus fuses human longing for direction, honesty and living into His own person.

The way is the journey of Israel from enslaved to the promised land; the journey of the disciples from Galilee to Jerusalem. The Way is what the Christian Movement was called before it was called Christian. The Jesus people followed the way, the good news of Jesus wherever they went. Not only His footsteps but the principles by which He shaped His life and teaching and His expectation that those who followed Him would do the same.

To be a Christian is to be dynamic. To be a Christian is to be on the move. Is that how your faith is lived? Does your faith, even if only in one way, move things for the good in and around your life? How you treat others, how you speak, the things that you are committed to, the causes you support? Is there more that needs moving by your faith, and how will you do it? What is the way of Christian women and men today? Where must they go? What must they be and do?

Jesus is the truth, He embodies truth, there is no side to Him. What you see is what you get. Though it is comforting, it is also unsettling. I suspect few if any of us would be able to hold Jesus' steady gaze for long. Truth has that ability to strip away all pretence, and falsehood, and cover-up. To be seen and to be understood as you really are. To be reduced down to your essence, how much would be left? What a terrifying prospect. No wonder, in John's Gospel, there is always the struggle between light (truth) and dark (falsehood). I wonder if one of the things that troubled the hearts of the disciples, and every follower of Jesus ever since, has been the sheer weight of the stories and half-truths and little lies and big ones that burden our lives. We don't always mean them, but the sheer weight of having to carry around all of those things that aren't quite right, aren't quite true is colossal.

In John Bunyan's 17th moral epic, *Pilgrim's Progress*, there is a momentous scene where the Pilgrim approaches Calvary, and the empty cross of Jesus. The burden he has been carrying all his

life suddenly rolls off his back and away, and he is set free. Jesus says, "I am the truth." Jesus sees; and sees through. Jesus frees; and frees for ever. If we will let Him and work with Him.

"I am the life", says Jesus. In the place of all that is broken, or soiled, or not fit for purpose, or empty, Jesus is life. The life. How often do we hold on to things for so long that we end up squeezing the life out of it and all we are left with are husks and shards and brittle emptiness. Jesus is life. Jesus wriggles and moves and can't be pinned down and is bright and intriguing and beguiling. Whenever we try to control life and box it in we either kill it, or, if it is Jesus, it slips away and re-establishes somewhere else. Jesus comes to breathe life into us, into His disciples, into His Church. In the last chapters of John's Gospel Jesus is always breathing on people (still a little unsettling after the Covid era!). I wonder why He's always breathing. Is it because after the chill of death in the tomb, with life and air drained from Him, it is simply a joy again to fill His lungs expansively and breathe. With that breath He speaks, maybe He even sings. This breathing, speaking, singing Jesus, filled with life, a life that pours out of Him and inspires, literally, all around Him, from that day to this.

Focusing on your breath for an extended amount of time and using deep breathing techniques can be very beneficial for improving circulation. Breathing deeply throughout the day can help you to feel more relaxed and can also reduce blood pressure and help you keep your heart rate regulated. As we breathe in fresh oxygen enters the blood, and as we breathe out carbon dioxide is released from the body. Each heartbeat starts and restarts the cycle of life and living. Jesus says, "I am the life." He is the heartbeat of the Church. He is the life-giver to every Christian child, woman and man.

Jesus saying that He is the way, the truth and the life is not, I think, exclusive. Rather, Jesus is particular about this route to God. For all we know there may be others. Jesus knows there are,

“other sheep that do not belong to the fold”ⁱⁱ who are still part of the God-wide family. All we know is that for us, we have heard of this way, the Jesus way, and truth, and life, that will lead us on the road home to heaven, and to the God Who waits, no, Who is already on the look-out for us and runs, with outstretched arms, to welcome in every last one of God’s prodigals, whoever they are, from wherever they have come, and whatever they might have done or been.

This story, in the Book the Moderator gave to the King. This story, in the Book we share together each Sunday, in readings and sermon. So that we might know Jesus. So that we might find His Way, truth, and life. So that we when the time comes, might be welcomed home, into God’s many-roomed house, and be troubled no more.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen**

ⁱ Cynthia A Jarvis, *Feasting on the Word, Year A Vol 2*, p467

ⁱⁱ John 10:16