

## "What a Way!"

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*Second in a series on John 14*

John 14.1-6

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Jesus said to them, *"Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I'm going."*

Thomas asked, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?"*

Jesus answered, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

John 14.1-6

Common English Bible

Jesus was talking about this place. He called it his "Father's House." I unpacked this a bit last week. I think he was talking about God's New Creation, the New Heaven and the New Earth, the Eternal Banquet. These are all different expressions for the same thing. This is what Jesus is saving us for, forgiving us for. He is rescuing and redeeming us from all that is wrong in ourselves and in the world to fit us for his Father's House.

He was about to leave them to go there, and Jesus seemed to think they knew what he was talking about. No! Thank you, Thomas, for daring to ask: Where is it? How do we get there?

*"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Are you happy with Jesus' answer?

Talking about his Father's House, Jesus felt spacious. There is nothing confined or cramped, and always room to spare. Now, however, he gets uncomfortably narrow.

The Father's House has room enough, but Jesus is the *only* Way there. And Jesus is the *only* Truth that will guide you on the *only* Way there. And *only* Jesus' life will carry you along the *only* Way there.<sup>1</sup> Only Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> I think Frederick Dale Bruner expresses Jesus' meaning well: *"I am the Way there, and I am the truth that will lead you on the Way there, and I am the Life that will give you the power to follow the Truth along the Way there."* The Gospel of John, A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 812.

## II

Jesus's claim confronts us, and we want to wiggle out of it.

Like, maybe Jesus didn't really say it. Maybe the Gospel-writer John put those words in his mouth. But I'm not so quick to dismiss John's witness to Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Besides, this is consistent with the whole New Testament and everything we know about Jesus.<sup>3</sup> So that wiggling won't work.

Maybe honeying the words to make them easier to swallow. Like, he is one way among many ways. Or, he is the way for Christians, and there are other ways for others. But the actual words don't let that wiggling work either. "*I am the way.*" Not *a* way. Not *one of many ways*. "*I am the truth.*" Not one among a diversity of truths. "*I am the life.*" The *only* abundant and everlasting life. We might want to disagree with Jesus, but let's at least grant that he says what he says.

We try to wiggle because these words make us squirm. Christians have weaponized them. We've wielded them as a sword to force people into our club. In the name of "saving people's souls" we have dragged people to Jesus and destroyed so much about them. We have blocked our ears to what they might teach us, including about God. We should squirm. We, Jesus' people, have much to repent for and much more to learn.

Still, we have Jesus: who he is, what he says, what he does. All point to this. "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"

## III

Then I noticed. . . . Where does Jesus say this?

Not on a hillside, shouting to the crowds. Not in a metropolitan market with people from all places and faiths passing by. If Jesus could have, would he have broadcast it over the airwaves, or made a meme to go viral? I doubt it. He does not hurl this into the face of the world.

He's with those whom he's brought into him, those disciples who are following him, those apostles whom he will send out. They are verging on their deepest discouragement, terrifying bewilderment, faith-crushing disappointment. They are about to crash down, and Jesus is lifting them up (us too). "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" It's like saying, "*You can come!*"

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, Jesus would have been speaking in Aramaic (or perhaps Hebrew), so the Greek words we have here are already a translation. This is true for all the gospels.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Wright observes, correctly I believe, that "[the] whole New Testament — the whole of early Christianity — insists that the one true and living God, the creator, is the God of Israel; and that [in Jesus] the God of Israel has acted decisively, within history, to bring Israel's story to its proper goal, and through that to address, and rescue, the world." N. T. Wright, John for Everyone, Part 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 60.

*You will come, because of me.*<sup>4</sup>

This is not a club, but a comfort. It is not about exclusivity, but encouragement. *Stay with me. Stick with me. Trust me. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life.*

#### IV

Then I remembered. . . . It was a while back. I was in the sanctuary of Holy Name of Jesus Church, the Roman Catholic parish in Hornepayne. That's tiny town we lived in. It was an ecumenical service, so people from the variety of congregations in town were worshipping together.

It's a simple sanctuary. Behind and above the altar hangs the crucifix, the body of Jesus on the cross. I have no problem with crucifixes. Still, they are different enough from what I'm used to that it kept drawing my attention.

Jesus kept drawing my attention. I thought about what he'd said. "*I am the way,*" said this man whose journey led to crucifixion. "*I am the truth,*" said this man clothed in humiliation and shame. "*I am the life,*" said this man slowly suffocating to death.

Really? Either it's a great insanity. Or, the most wondrous revelation of God.

Just before saying this, Jesus had knelt before dirty stinky feet, and sinful broken people, and washed them. The Way, the Truth, the Life served them with humility. He saves us humbly. He is who he is, and he pulls it off with no arrogance, nor violence, nor oppression.

Maybe the good news is that it is Jesus, this person, and not the sort of people the rest of us are, who is the Way, the Truth, the Life. Who would you rather it be?

#### V

Jesus does not lay out a trail way for us to follow to get to God. You know the image of many paths up a mountain. If those paths are created by people, well . . . you trust us? Some are going to be dead ends. Some will lead to precipices. Some will cause avalanches. Who's to say there is any way up? Or a way anyone could possibly manage?

Jesus is not someone who found or created a way to God. He is God who has come to us.

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<sup>4</sup> Bruner says, "*Jesus did not hurl this Christoexclusive text into the face of the world (to taunt it), but he gave it to his disciples (to encourage them).*" Bruner, 822.

Think of the cross's shape.<sup>5</sup> There is the vertical post of Jesus, planted in the earth and reaching to the heavens. Jesus, who has broken down the barrier we build and then become imprisoned by, the insurmountable barrier between us and God. Jesus has broken it down. No one else has. No one else needs too. He is enough.

This one vertical post supports the horizontal beam of Jesus. He reaches wide, as far as the whole creation, as far as the most desperate among us. Yes, even the most despicable among us, and that which is most despicable within each us. His salvation reaches wide and welcomes everyone.

What about those who do not know about Jesus, or do not trust him? I try to remember something C. S. Lewis wrote:

*God has not told us what [God's] arrangements about other people are. We do know that no [person] can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know [Christ] can be saved through Him.*<sup>6</sup>

Judgement is never our job. We are in no way qualified. Besides, the job is taken, by the One who gave himself for everyone.

Our work is simply to share our delight in Jesus, in ways that are delightful. Pope Francis put it this way:

*Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. . . . They should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet.*<sup>7</sup>

It's the banquet where Jesus has opened the door to welcome all, and we will feast together with him in his Father's House.

Thank God that he's the Way.

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> I'm adapting Bruner's image. He writes, "The vertical beam of the Cross — the exclusivity of Christ as the only way of salvation — must be firmly planted in our preaching and teaching, first of all. This beam is high and deep. But it carries another beam. Onto this firm vertical beam of the exclusivity of Christ must be nailed the horizontal beam of the inclusivity of Christ, which is as wide as the world, as far-reaching as the most desperate sinners, and is thus represented impressively in the Gospel witnesses." Bruner, 827.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Bruner, 823.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, [The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium](#) (Washington DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), 8-9.