

“THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE”

John 14:6

Today we are remembering once again the people who suffered and lost their lives during the wars of the twentieth century. There are few of us now with actual first hand memories of living through a war on our own soil and we rejoice, mainly, that we live in comparative peace now. But we pray for peace for our world and for those places where war is still a very present reality.

But living in a situation without war does not necessarily mean that we all experience true peace. The current context of our pandemic and the very real pressures that it brings have brought home to us the need for peace, for a sense of assurance that everything is going to be alright. Along with the parallel issue of our exit from the European Community, we are finding that what is going on around us has exposed some clear fault lines and divisions within our nation, our community, even our church. And in our own lives, the daily demands on us and the anxieties we have about the immediate and ongoing future leave us desperate for a sense of peace.

The turbulence we feel and the stresses we experience are undoubtedly a part of the human condition, the nature of our lives that have been blighted by evil and sin. We are not, as we say so often, as God wants us to be, enjoying his love and his peace as he intended. That’s why he sent Jesus into our world, to help us rediscover the love of God and the very real peace and assurance that are the hallmarks of his redeemed people. Indeed, as he told his disciples in the words Dorothy has just read to us, peace was to be his lasting legacy – *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* This peace isn’t just an absence of war, the promise of a quiet life or an anxiety-free wander between the very real obstacles and difficulties that life throws up. This is the peace that comes with the assurance that God does have it all sorted out and we will eventually be able to enjoy that with him for eternity.

But let’s look at the context in which Jesus says these words and another key saying of his that helps us see what he is driving at. This isn’t just an isolated little platitude to help cheer up his anxious followers that we can continue to trot out today when we encounter those who are struggling.

It’s an emotional evening. Jesus is together with his disciples getting ready to celebrate the Passover meal with them in a borrowed upstairs room. He alone really knows what the next few hours hold in store, but he has tried to tell his friends on several occasions – they just haven’t understood, haven’t been able to take it all in. It’s obvious, though, that something is bothering him and the atmosphere is rather subdued. To add to the feeling of strangeness, as the disciples arrive, Jesus strips off his cloak and begins

to wash their feet – the task of a servant, not of a friend or rabbi, a teacher. We read of that in the previous chapter (*John 13*).

Jesus then goes on to talk in more detail about the way in which he is to be betrayed and how Peter will even deny that he knows Jesus. There's a mood of gloom about the evening, which should have been such a joyful celebration of God's goodness to his people. Jesus recognises this and tries to provide the disciples with some comfort. "*Don't worry,*" he says. "*You believe in God, you can trust me too. I'm only going to get things ready for when we meet up again.*"

Again, there is confusion in the minds of the disciples, but Thomas has the courage to ask where Jesus is going and how the others can get to meet him there (v5). Jesus' answer is another of the well-known "*I am*" sayings that form a kind of framework for the main section of John's Gospel – "*I am the way and the truth and the life.*" "*I am the way*" is the direct answer to Thomas's question, but that makes no sense without the truth and the life. And the offer of peace from Jesus makes no sense without any of this.

Again, that probably didn't help the disciples very much, because Jesus has to go on and explain even that. As we're always reminding ourselves, we have the benefit of hindsight, the rest of the New Testament and two thousand years of preaching and teaching to help us. On the face of it, though, what Jesus says here seems to be a real paradox: it's difficult to make sense of it on a superficial level. Here is Jesus claiming to be **the way** to God, and the way he is about to tread is one of humiliation, of suffering and of great sacrifice. He claims to be **the truth** and yet, in a few hours' time, he will be sentenced to death on the word of several perjured witnesses. He claims to be **the life**, but says that in a conversation in which he is trying to explain his death to a bunch of people who will shortly be putting his body in a tomb.

How can all this be applicable to him? What does it mean? To the disciples on that particular evening I'm sure it meant nothing – another frustratingly enigmatic answer to a perfectly straightforward question, part of his way of apparently speaking only in riddles. But as the disciples began to see the events of the next six weeks unfold, they could see it beginning to make sense. And as we look at it today, from a vantage point far away from the original setting, we can reflect on what it really means for us and for our world.

1. THE WAY

Jesus tells his disciples that he is the way to the Father – “*No-one comes to the Father except through me.*” That’s an idea which is at the very heart of our gospel, of our faith, an idea that many find deeply suspicious in our pluralistic and so-called tolerant age – the exclusivity of Jesus. The way for men and women to get to God, to rediscover their intended and fulfilling relationship with him, has been mined by sin: there is a great crater in that road that no-one can get around. People have tried for centuries to find a way across and around that crater, which represents our own essentially selfish and disobedient nature.

Some try to cross it under their own steam, as it were, by doing good works and trying to live good lives. Some try to get around it by turning to other gods, but that takes them off in the wrong direction. Some try to get across it by building up their own systems of philosophy, but such bridges simply collapse under the strain. And many people do not even want to acknowledge that the crater is there. But there is a way across, and that way is Jesus. He has bridged the gap. He has made possible the crossing from one side to the other, to the place where God is waiting to welcome us.

When we come to realise that we are in need of God’s help, and believe that God can help us – indeed, that he has already helped us by allowing Jesus to take away our punishment – then the way becomes clearer. Paul puts it this way in *Romans 5:1,2* – “*Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have **gained access** by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*”

Jesus truly is **THE** way, because no other way leads to God. All other paths are sure to end in disappointment – or, to put it more strongly, all other roads lead to an eternity cut off from God. As Peter tells the magistrates in Jerusalem after Pentecost, “*There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (*Acts 4:12*). It’s a way back to God from our sinful rejection of him. As the old chorus puts it: “*There’s a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, there’s a door that is open and you may go in. At Calvary’s cross is where you begin, when you come as a sinner to Jesus.*”

2. THE TRUTH

Not long after this conversation, Jesus was standing in front of the Roman governor, facing trial for the charges that the Jewish leaders had laid against him. As Jesus told Pilate that he had “*come into the world to testify to the truth*”, Pilate asked him the question that has been asked by millions of people down through the ages: “*What is truth?*” (*John 18:37,38*).

How do we know what is true? Certainly not by reading the newspapers. Not by watching the television or listening to the radio. For some people, things are true if they read them in a book. For others, they are true if their teacher told them (I know very well that's not always the case!). We like to believe things that help us make sense of our situation, don't we? The forced confessions of criminals help because they help the court make sense of the crime. We often believe April Fool pranks because they seem to make sense in a particular context.

Well, Jesus is the truth because he ultimately provides us with something that makes sense of life. He spoke of sin and human selfishness – that helps us make sense of the world around us, especially if we are prepared to take into account human responsibility and acknowledge that there are times when blame is necessary. He spoke of our relationship with God who created us – that helps us make sense of why we're on this earth. He spoke of punishment for sin – that helps us make sense of our awareness of sin and guilt. He spoke of his own sacrifice for our sin – that helps us make sense of a situation in which a totally blameless man was executed on a cross.

Jesus helps us to make sense of our lives. I always remember the publicity for Billy Graham's *Mission '89* in London which very cleverly played on this idea – a teaser campaign with various anagrams of "life" then later a poster with a picture of Billy Graham and "Come and hear a man who can help you make sense of it". It doesn't all come in one blinding flash of inspiration, but we do begin to see the things that are most important. Compare Jesus' way of looking at things with any other philosophy or religion and you'll see that there's a great deal more sense in his teaching than in any other. And you can rely on it – it's the truth because it helps make sense of life.

3. THE LIFE

When Jesus talks about life, when the Bible talks about life, it isn't simply the here and now that is meant. Life means eternal life, it means life which begins now but continues for ever in God's new creation after this brief spell is over, a life spent enjoying the presence of God and free of all that now limits and distresses us. It's a life that is perfect as God originally intended, so there is no room for anything or anyone tainted by sin. Going back to that earlier image of the crater in the road, sinful men and women, those who have not reached out to receive the gift of God's grace offered in Jesus, die on this side of the chasm without any opportunity of being reunited with God. In this situation, God is on the other side of the gap and we cannot ever experience the life that comes from a real relationship with him.

But God has sent Jesus across the gap to bring us back. He is our life – the means of our spending eternity on the right side of the chasm. When you talk to people who live in the remoter parts of the country – those who live in isolated villages or faraway farms – they will tell you that their car is their life. In other words, their car enables them to participate fully in life. Jesus is our life in the sense that he enables us to participate fully in life, to participate in life more fully now and in the life of eternity.

Other people may tell you that their job is their life, or their family is their life, or that sport is their life. What they are saying is that it's those things which make life worth living. In that sense, too, Jesus is our life, because he makes life worth living, he gives us purpose, he gives us satisfaction despite all the other stuff that is going on in our situations. Jesus can give us life that is "*life lived to the full*" (*John 10:10*). We enjoy ourselves as Christians because we realise that all we have comes from God and he gave it to us to enjoy. And we have a greater sense of enjoyment because we realise that dying and meeting God as our judge doesn't mean we have to fear – we needn't spend all this life worrying about it and feeling guilty and ashamed - we are forgiven! And Jesus provides the only way to cross the great divide that really leads to life.

So this might not seem such a great riddle now as it was for those first disciples. Jesus' words give us a description that makes more sense than anything else. **Jesus is The Way**, because it is only through belief in him that we can ever hope to approach God. **Jesus is The Truth**, because it is only in following his teaching and example that we can ever hope to make sense of life. **Jesus is The Life**, because he makes real living possible now and gives us hope for the next stage of our life, that of eternity with him in heaven.

And with that hope comes peace – the peace that means we do not have to worry about our eternal future; the peace that does not ignore or attempt to dismiss the very real difficulties that this life throws up – be they war or pandemic or whatever; but the peace that means we can look forward, look beyond the here and now to spending eternity with God, just as he originally intended for us. Reach out and accept that peace this morning as you acknowledge Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life..

"THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE"

John 14:6

This saying of Jesus comes as part of his final conversation with the disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus has been talking about his betrayal, his arrest and the fact that he is going to leave them. John 14 begins with Jesus trying to comfort his disciples by telling them that he is really only going on ahead of them to prepare a place for them where they will all meet up again.

Unfortunately, the disciples don't understand what Jesus is talking about and, in 14:5, Thomas voices the question that they are all asking themselves. Jesus replies by explaining that he is "the Way, the Truth and the Life". To us, this must seem rather ironic, as Jesus has taken the way which is most difficult; he is about to be executed on the basis of lies; and he will shortly die in humiliating circumstances. How, then, can this be applicable to him?

THE WAY

Jesus is the only way that we can get into a right relationship with God. Romans 5:2 says that we "have access to God" through Jesus. We also read in Acts 4:12 that there is no other way to God.

THE TRUTH

In comparison with Jesus, nothing else in our world really makes sense. He is the only one who can provide the true way to live. Men and women throughout history have asked the question that Pilate asked in John 18:37,38, but many have failed to see that Jesus is the real truth, the only real reason for living.

THE LIFE

Any other way of trying to live our lives, apart from following Jesus, is bound to end in death (eternal death or punishment). Not only does Jesus give us the prospect of life, but he describes it as "life lived to the full" (John 10:10).

Questions for discussion

1. How is Jesus the way to God? Look at Hebrews 10:19-22.
2. Look at Matthew 27:63. What had the Jewish leaders failed to understand about Jesus?
3. Jesus is the only truth. How does the Devil try to deceive us today?
4. What do you understand by "life" as Jesus talks about it? How does that affect the way you live your life here and now?
5. On what basis can we make exclusive claims about Jesus? Are such claims still valid in today's multi-cultural society?
6. How do you understand the peace that Jesus brings? What does it mean to you?

"Without the Way, there is no going;
without the Truth, there is no knowing;
without the Life, there is no living."
(Thomas à Kempis)