



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
3 Stanmore Bay Road,
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.
www.ststephenswgp.org.nz

Sermon

Jesus - the real and living way to God the Father

John 14:1-14; Exodus 33:12-23

10th May 2020

© 2020 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

There is so much in this gospel passage that I can only address a few aspects. Let me start with the famous verse 6. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”

This is of course, another of the “I AM” statements of Jesus. These are in themselves claims to divinity because when God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush, he said his name was “I AM THAT I AM”. But note when Moses asked whom shall I say sent me, he is told, “Say Yahweh sent me.” Now Yahweh can be translated as “He is.” So God’s personal name is highly descriptive for one who is the very essence of life. When he speaks of himself in the first person he calls himself, “I AM.” When others speak of him, they are to say, “He is.”

For Jesus to make these emphatic “I AM” statements was a claim to divinity. Of course the gospel reading continues with more such claims as he asserts his unity with the Father – but I haven’t time to address those as well.

The Way

Some weeks ago, I spoke of the understanding that Jesus being the way. A way is a means of getting to the destination but also the manner of going to that destination. We get to the Father through or by means of Jesus, yet at the same time the way we live as we do that, is also the way. We follow the way of life and teachings of Jesus as we are being saved. The early church was called The Way.

Last week, we looked at Jesus the Good shepherd. There he called himself the gate. The sheep go in and out of the sheepfold by the gate. It is another metaphor for Jesus being the Way.

Truth

He also said he is the truth. A new understanding for me is that the Greek word truth, Alethea is actually about reality. That is the first meaning of the word. Truth is true because it is real not false. Not so much the ivory tower idea of a true statement but one which accords with what is really so. Jesus is really true. He is truly real. Ultimate reality is found in him.

That is hardly surprising since the New Testament also tells us that he created everything and in him all things hold together. ¹

¹ Colossians 1:16-17

Life

He is the life. In Greek there are two words for life: *bios* and *zoe*. *Bios* is used of the extent of life – duration, manner or moral conduct of living. However, *zoe* is used of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the God had in himself. Jesus asserts he is that inherent nature of life itself.

As we put these three attributes together what can we say? Jesus is the real and living way to God the Father. The commentator, Dr William Hendriksen wrote, “He is the final reality in contrast to the shadows which preceded him.” All God’s attributes are in the Son and he is the source and giver of life for his own.

We could say, The way brings us to God; the truth makes us free; the life produces fellowship. Without Christ there is no redemptive truth, no everlasting life, hence no way to the Father.

Having said that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life, Jesus continued, ‘no one come to the Father but by me.’”

The Passion Translation renders this as, “I am the Way, I am the (real) Truth, and I am the Life. No one comes **next** to the Father except through *union with me*. [TPT]

The Greek word *pros* translated “to” has a range of meanings: toward; with, in company with; at, about, near, beside.

Hence the Passion Translation’s choice of “next to the Father.” There is a reason for my focusing on this preposition please bear with me.

Jesus says it is only by him that we can come near to the Father. Again *dia* has shades of meaning: through, by means of, with. He is the agent for our approach to the Father.

Mainly music sent out an email this last week advertising some resources. One was a booklet called “Try Praying.” They quoted the experience of Joe, a young man who found it life changing:

"By the time I was 20 my relationship with my mum had gone downhill and I had to leave home. I was angry and upset about this and missed my younger brother and sister.

I turned away from God and stopped believing in him. But I still carried a small cross around, as well as a “Try Praying” booklet I’d picked up somewhere. There were a couple of the stories that stuck with me. They were both about men who didn’t believe in God. I decided that whether God was real or not, I was going to pray regardless, especially that God would look after my siblings. This was a starting point for me. The “Try Praying” booklet had words written in it that a person could say to welcome Jesus into their life, so I said them.

Prayers from my childhood became an integral part of my thinking. I would find myself, as I still do, repeating them during the day. Things in my life began to get easier and I never forgot about the testimonies, though I didn’t really understand them.

Then one night, while in my bed, I began to have a weird feeling. It was as if there was someone in my room pressing down on me. I don’t believe in ghosts, but the flat I was living in, the previous tenant had died there - so feeling scared, I began to say the ‘Our Father’ prayer.

I closed my eyes and the inside of my mind lit up. I can only describe it the same as the black and white speckles that show on a TV when you take out the aerial; except that it was not black and white, but glittering gold. In the centre of what I could see, there was a cross and it began to pulsate. I remember being quite freaked out and asking, ‘Who is it?’

That was when the Lord spoke to me and said, ‘Joe, it’s me Jesus.’

I asked him what my life was about and he said that the purpose of my life was for love. Then he let me feel his love and it washed over and filled my entire body. I started to cry because it was a feeling that I can in no way even give a glimmer in an email, but it left me with no doubt that Jesus Christ was God and that he existed. It was the most wonderful moment that I have ever had the privilege to experience, and I can say with an open and honest heart, that since that night, my life has never been the same.

I know that there is nothing that God cannot do. God communicates with me every day and is continuing to lead me through my life - until I finally get home, and won’t have to go anywhere else - because I

will be with him. I know God loves me very much, and I am so grateful that he came to me in the way that he did.

Jesus was the way for Joe to come to the Father. Jesus brought Joe into life and truth.

Last Wednesday, some of us were meeting for the parish Zoom prayer meeting. The set readings included the Exodus passage we have heard today. I had that morning read John 14 in the Passion translation and noted the nuance of Jesus bringing us next to the Father. In the Exodus passage I was startled when I heard verse 21, 'Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock."'

The idea of being near – physically near God – surprised me. But I was struck by the similarity to the wording of being brought next to the Father in John 14. Furthermore, the rock in Exodus is stated in the NT to be the presence of Christ with them. So here was the thought of standing on the rock (Christ) and being near the Lord.

The context for this passage in Exodus is that a covenant has been made between God and the Israelites with Moses as intermediary. The people agreed to the covenant and Moses went up Mt Sinai to receive the Law. While he was there, the people became impatient and worshipped false gods. God expresses his rejection of the people but Moses intercedes even offering that he himself should pay the penalty for them. God refuses to take his life for the people's sin and the covenant is renewed.

Although God said they would go to the Promised Land, he would not go with them. Moses pleaded with God that he should go with them for otherwise how would people know they had this covenant with God. God agrees to this. Then Moses asks to see God's glory. This is an astonishing request.

However, God agreed saying he could come near him and stand on a rock and he would pass before him and Moses would see his glory although not his face lest he die. This too was part of the making of the covenant, just as it was with Abraham, when God made covenant with him, he passed by the sacrifice Abraham had laid out for him.

All the rest of the book of Exodus is about the re-establishing of the conditions of the covenant and the building of the tabernacle to be the tent in which God would accompany them. Only once the tabernacle was built would the journey continue.

I see strong parallels to between this account and that of Jesus in John 14.

Jesus is of course the Prophet greater than Moses whom it was prophesied would come. Moses said, in Deuteronomy 18:17-19:

The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account."

In Exodus 33, Moses pleaded that the Lord's presence would go with them and that if not, they should go forward.

Moses is invited to stand on a rock near to the Lord and see him pass by. Jesus tells us that he (the rock) is the way to come to the Father or to be near the Father.

Jesus assured his disciples that although he was going to the cross, he would return for them. John 14:3: "I will come back and take you to be with me." This is Jewish bridegroom language. Part of the wedding arrangements involve the bridegroom going to prepare the dwelling place where he would live with his wife. This would usually be on his father's property, often an addition to the family house – as it still is today with Palestinians. When the place was ready he would return for her and take her to the wedding ceremony and so to his father's house. Why is that significant? Because God deals with us in covenants. And the wedding covenant is the one he especially uses as a metaphor of the salvation covenant with his people. It is the same in the Old Testament: the development of the covenant between God and Israel in Exodus and the following history used the language of Jewish courtship customs through to full covenant.

When is this return, which he refers to in Chapter 14? Certainly, he would return in a few days at the resurrection when he met them in the Upper room. But he talks of preparing a place for them in his Father's house. This can be understood as in the afterlife. So he returns to take them to where he is when they (and we die). This passage was used this way by the early church.

The other fulfillment may be in the second coming, when he returns for the Church. And all of these can be equally true – just subsequent fulfillments of the same multi-layered promise.

The parallel to Moses in Exodus lies in the promise soon to come in the chapter where Jesus promises the very presence of God in each believer in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Here is the tabernacle theme being worked out.

The ancient tabernacle was a tent which held the presence of God. There is a strongly development in the new Testament that Jesus is the fulfillment of the tabernacle, being the dwelling of God on earth during his incarnation. But after the Ascension, the church becomes the new Tabernacle. We, the disciples of Jesus, together become the dwelling of God on earth because we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Just as the book of Exodus continued with the building of the Tabernacle, so the story continues after Jesus' ascension with the building of the new tabernacle the Church.

My friends, there are breathtaking ideas in this gospel passage: Jesus coming for us on our death and at the second coming; the divinity of Christ, his being the true and living way for us to be near the Father, some ideas of the unity of the Father and the Son and the miracle-working promises of Jesus in just 14 verses.

Glory be to God for his high calling for us in this world and the next. Amen.