

# St. Bride's Church of Scotland, Newtonmore

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WAY TRUTH AND LIFE

2<sup>nd</sup> April 2017

Isaiah 53:1-6  
John 14:1-11

I am the way and the truth and the life.

If there is one statement which Jesus made which has caused offence, it is this one! It is so all-embracing. The claim it makes is absolute. There is no room for question. In saying these words, Jesus has, over the years, laid himself open to the charge of arrogance. I am *the way* and *the truth* and *the life*. He would be forgiven more, and his words accepted more readily if they did not make that absolute claim. If he had said "I am a way, and part of the truth and a hint of the life" there are many who would have found this better. But he didn't, and the absolute claim which the church has made for him always is based upon these words.

Why would he say these things? Was it arrogance? It is meant to be comforting. Jesus is speaking to his disciples in the upper room at the time of the last supper. He has begun the evening by washing their feet, and then, though John's gospel does not record it, he has shared the meal and used the bread and wine to talk of his coming death. The disciples might be slow at times, but by now they have understood that the end of their time together is coming, although Peter has tried hard to hide from this fact and has just sworn never to leave or desert Jesus. But Jesus knew better, knew the way things were going better, and knew Peter better. And he has just told Peter that he will deny him three times before cock-crow.

But he and the rest are not to let this truth trouble them. This is the time for all that they have learned to believe about God and about Jesus to be put into action. Their time together is coming to an end, but only because he is going on before them. He is going to his father's house to get a place ready. And he reassured the disciples that there will be room. Sometimes when families plan a get together, they try to cram into a parent's house, and find that since they left home they have grown, in size and in number and that although it is fun to get together, they don't really all fit in what they still think of as the parental home. People have to bed down on the couch, or on the floor, or even in the bath! It's OK for a while, but you wouldn't want it for a permanency. Will Jesus' Father's house be like this? Will there be room?

There is only one other time when Jesus has spoken of his Father's house, and that is when he was driving the merchants and the animals out of the temple. And then he was very clearly referring to the temple as his Father's house. "Take these things out of here!" he said. "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (John 2:16) Now he is just as clearly not talking about the Jerusalem temple. But, in a way, he is talking about the same thing. The Jews believed that the temple in Jerusalem was where heaven and earth met, where, because of God's presence, there was a little bit of heaven on earth. Jesus is promising that he is going to prepare a place for his friends in God's presence – not in the temple building, but in heaven, and in the new

creation when God re-makes heaven and earth. There wouldn't be room for very many in the Jerusalem temple, not even all the Jews could squeeze in together. But in God's new home, there will be room for everyone. The promise is all-embracing. Everyone is welcome.

This is great, but what worries people is what Jesus says when Thomas, dear, grumpy, dubious Thomas, points out that they don't know where he is going, not really, and they certainly don't know how to get there. "I am the way and the truth and the life."

We live in a world and a society which, when it is not hostile to religion, would like to think that one is as good as another and that if there is a God, there are many different paths to reach him. But if you ask the religions themselves, none of them say that, and to hold to that happy, vague belief is to misunderstand all religions. Most religions hold to a belief in God - sometimes in more than one god - and most have lots of similarities in their moral codes. But the reasons behind those moral codes are very different, and that is what matters. Yes, a good Muslim or a good Hindu or a good Buddhist will be a very good person, morally at least as good as a good Christian, but if we think religions are just about morals, about being good, we are wrong, and as Christians we know that, if we stop and think.

The world outside of faith would like to think that religion is about morality, and would like to use religion to help grow a moral society, but we know that morality and a moral society is a consequence of religion, not its prime motivation. As Christians, unlike in many other religions, we know that we are not good, when we are good, if we are good, to try to win God's approval, but because Jesus died for us and we want to show God our thankfulness and our love. If we were not thankful, if we did not know God's love, we would have no motivation to live to please God. Not all religions are the same in this. For some, duty, or fear, or personal spiritual gain can be the prime motivation for good behaviour.

Not all religions make the same claims, either. No other major religious figure - not Krishna, not Mohammed, not the Buddha, ever claimed to be one with God in person and in action. Jesus did. We heard him say so this morning. Philip, who surely doesn't realise the hugeness of what he is asking, says, as if asking just a small favour, "Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied!" Show us the Father, and we won't ask anything more - as if there were more that could be asked! And Jesus probably sighs, inwardly at least, and says "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?" He has been showing them the Father for three years or so, with every breath he has taken, every word he has spoken, every step or action he has performed.

It was God the Father they were seeing when Jesus knelt and washed their feet.  
It was God the Father who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey  
It was the Father who stood at Lazarus' tomb and wept.  
It was the Father who healed the blind man, the Father who fed five thousand hungry people, the Father who walked on water and calmed their fears, the Father who turned water into wine and made a party go, the Father who cleansed his house of trade and noise and dirt.

And it was the Father, God the Father who was on his way to give his life, the shepherd for the sheep. He was going, as the prophet said, without majesty, despised and rejected, to suffering and grief to bear our infirmities and carry our diseases - of

body, mind and soul. And no one was going to understand. Jesus was going to do that, setting off that very night, and this meant that God the Father was doing it, for they are one. And this is why Jesus is the way and the truth and the life.

If we find it hard to accept the absolute claim that Jesus made that Spring evening, the night before his death, then in fact we lose any good from the New Testament, and we are left with just a vague improvement of the Old Testament Jewish understanding of a God who needs appeasing. If Jesus is only one way to God, then we still have to do good so that God will be pleased, and we know very little of God's love for us. If when we look at Jesus we do not see the Father, then his death was not God's way of opening his loving heart to all who would come, but just a horrible mistake. It is when we understand that Jesus and the Father are one that we can understand what his death meant, and the depth of his love and redemption. It is when we understand that Jesus and the Father are one that we see that of course there is no other way to come to God, for Jesus is God himself, and he invites us directly to come to and through him.

Jesus said He is the way; he, Jesus, and it is not an arrogant claim, and it is not a way of superiority, setting oneself above the rest, but quite the reverse. It is a way of humility, of tears and fears and hunger, of love and laughter. Other religious systems may give hints as to what God is like – and they are usually hints about the remoter side of God, the pure side of God, the holy side of God – only Jesus has shown us God among us. Too often people, sometimes good Christian people have come to Jesus with a set idea of what God is like and tried to make him fit. We take the old covenant and try to align the new covenant sealed in Jesus' blood with it. But that was what Jesus was trying to do away with in those who followed him. We should not come to him thinking we know about God, and seeing if he matches up. We need to come to him looking for God, for it is Jesus who will show us God, in all his holiness. It will not be like the old way, because it is new.

And we will find that his way is a way of humility, and that his truth and the truth about him, is surprising. And we will find that the life he offers is for now as well as for all time. So many of the things that Jesus said about himself, end up being about life: I am the resurrection and the life, as we saw last week, I am the bread of life, I am the good shepherd, who is about life in all its fullness, and next week we will look at Jesus saying he is the vine whose life flows through his people. Life was what Jesus was about, and as we go through this season of Lent we should remember that life was what his death was about, his life, our life, God's life for us all. Only as we follow him in his way and his truth. Amen.