

# **“The Scandal of Particularity”**

## **5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

**April 20, 2008**

Texts: Psalm 66:1-11 / Acts 17:1-15 / 1 Peter 2:1-10 / John 14:1-14

### **John 14:1-14**

#### **I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life**

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if 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. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.” 5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

12 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” What does that really mean? And, if we understand it, do we really believe it?

Does it mean that, when it comes to my spiritual life, my prayer life, or when I'm at Church, that Jesus is our foremost example? Surely, in my business, in my daily work, in my profession, in my family, there are other authorities that I must consider...other paths I must follow...in order to be successful...in order to be liked...in order to be admired. Surely, I have to use my own judgment about what is right in these daily situations. The Bible, Jesus' own words about how I am going to act, to treat my wife, to treat my children, to treat my co-workers, to treat my fellow

Christians at St. John's, to live in this world, is really outdated material that I can't be bothered to consult, let alone follow.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Just last week, Fr. Joe showed us from the tenth chapter of John's Gospel that Jesus was the door to the sheepfold. He protects us from those that would do us harm and cares for us as the good and loving shepherd. But, how can He do these things if we won't let Him? If instead, we are lord of our own lives and know what's best, and never seek to consult Christ in prayer, or in the words of the Bible, and never seek to worship Him and serve Him daily, how can He be the door to salvation, the door to security, the door to eternal life and abundant life right now?

Jesus wasn't just speaking to hear the sound of His own voice. He was speaking first to the disciples, and now to anyone who would follow Him. He, and He alone is THE WAY...THE TRUTH...THE LIFE! Do you really and truly believe this? Because, if you did, it would transform our lives and transform this church.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This is what is often termed in the theological circles "the scandal of particularity." Those who study other religions and seek to bring religions together, have real difficulty with this statement of Jesus'. Many would say that this is arrogant of us. Who are we to say that all other religions are a mere shadow of true Christianity? Well, for one, Jesus has said this, in this verse. You either believe what He says, and who He says He Himself is, or you call Him a liar.

Secondly, St. Peter says it just as starkly in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 4, verse 12, "And there is salvation in NO ONE ELSE, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." C.S. Lewis himself has put in poignantly. Jesus is either Liar, Lunatic, or Lord. There is no in between. We either believe that He is a lunatic for thinking He is God, or we believe that He is the worst kind of deluded liar, or we have to believe that He is who He said He was, the Lord God Almighty Himself!

No other religion on earth claims that a man was God incarnate...only Christianity. No other religion on earth claims that you can have a personal, abiding, intimate relationship with the Creator of the Universe. No other religion says that its founder is still living. So, all of this is just plain foolishness...or it is the truth!

And it is because of the uniqueness of Christ that we also are given the drive to bring others to Christ, even to mount groups of people, of missionaries, to be sent to other countries that do not know Jesus Christ. Because, if Jesus is the only way to the Father, if Jesus is the only particular one, in whom belief will yield you eternal life, then the most loving thing we can do is tell others about Christ!

Many people profess to faith in Jesus Christ. Many people profess to be Christians, followers of Jesus Christ. But, just saying something does not make it so. Now, those of you who are still with me and still believe what Jesus Christ says in these verses, that He is the only way to the Father, what are the ramifications of this belief? In other words, if we truly believed this, what would each of our lives look like?

Well, let us take this verse and separate it into its constituent parts. First, "I am the way." Thomas has just asked Jesus, "How can we know the way?"

First, by the subtleness of the expression, "I am," Jesus is making a very important point. Remember that when Moses met God in the burning bush in the Book of Exodus, Moses asked God what His Name was. God the Father replied, "I am who I am...say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" So Jesus is claiming to be God through his use of the phrase "I am." Secondly, Jesus is claiming that He is the only path to truth and life. There is no other way. In the original Greek this is clear through the use of the definite article "the". Jesus does not say, as many in the present day would have liked, "I am A way, A truth, and A life." Instead Jesus is clear and definite. He is the only way. Through understanding His words, through following His example, through having complete faith only in Him, is the pathway to eternal life right now and in the future.

The pathway to true fulfillment for every human being is not through sending your kids to Clemson, or South Carolina, or Tennessee. The pathway is not through a better job or a greater paycheck. The pathway is not through finding a good wife or husband. The pathway is not through a secure retirement. The pathway is through Jesus and Him alone. Some might ask, as did Thomas, but, still, “How can we know the way?” Well, it is my belief that we do know the way, because we follow the way of dedication and of sacrifice in other areas of our lives, just often not in our faith.

Just two nights ago, I had the opportunity with Beth and my daughters to spend some time watching some of the finest women tennis players in the world at the Family Circle Cup here in Charleston. It is amazing the speed, skill, and agility with which these women play, and to think of the many hours of dedication and hard work which have led them to be at the top of their game. And just last week I had the opportunity to spend a day at the Masters’ Golf Tournament in Augusta, GA. While I was there I had a chance to follow the great golfer Tiger Woods for several holes. To watch him drive the ball, to hear the thwack of club meeting ball is exhilarating. But, Tiger Woods did not pop from His mother’s womb fully-formed wearing a red polo shirt and a golf club in his hand. Many of you may have seen the home movies his Dad took of him when he was just a small child and heard him say as a small boy that he wanted to compete at the Master’s and be the greatest golfer of all time. We all know what kind of singular dedication that takes from early childhood and into adulthood. Such dedication may be exemplary, but if it is only for the glorification of man or the individual, then isn’t it after all, misplaced? If Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life for all human beings...if we really and truly believe that, then what sort of sacrifice and dedication are we willing to make to make it so? If our children have not been taught God’s word, if they do not know the great stories of Scripture, if they do not have a deep, personal, and abiding relationship with Jesus Christ, but they can hit golf shot with the best of them, or serve a tennis ball at well over 100 MPH, so much are they the poorer for it. Because those skills,

as fun and important as they may be, do not rival eternal life and abundant life with Christ right now! Amen?

And if we approached our faith and the passing along of our faith as we did teaching our children how to swing a club or bat or racket, or how to study for school, or sail a boat, what would our church look like? What would our society look like? Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

Now, the final two elements of this verse. Jesus says that He is also “the truth, and the life.”

Truth and life correspond to Jesus’ roles in this Gospel as revealer and life-giver. God alone is truth and life, and when our rebellion separated us from God, we plunged into ignorance and death. It follows that the way to the Father requires both revelation, because of our ignorance, and life, due to our death (Whitacre, *John*, p. 351).

We know that God’s Word is found in Holy Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ is truth. And we have abundant life and eternal life because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. As one fourteenth century writer has put it so well, “[Jesus] is the way, and in addition He is the lodging on the way and its destination.” As the popular song puts it, “He is our all in all.”

If this sermon has been disconcerting to you...good! Because these verses from John’s Gospel are always disconcerting and challenging to me, as they are also at the same time encouraging. If you feel that what I have said has turned your “world upside down” then you are not alone. Recall that the Jews in Thessalonica thought the same thing when Paul and Silas came to their town preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:6). God’s Word should always be challenging and should always turn our cozy worlds on their ears.

But, let us remember how this passage began. Jesus said first, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” Do not be anxious. Do not be afraid. Do not beat yourself up for what you have not done, what you have not accomplished. Fall back on Christ. Believe in Him and ask Him to deepen your

faith. Begin today reading His Word and meditating on His message. Begin today teaching your children about Christ, reading them the great stories of Scripture and teaching them about a new way of living. Ask His Holy Spirit to fill you and the members of your family with life-giving love and power. And ask Him day by day to fill you. Because, as Bishop J.C. Ryle has correctly indicated, “Faith in the Lord Jesus is the only sure medicine for troubled hearts.” Cast all your desires, your troubles, your concerns, at the feet of Jesus. “Let not your hearts be troubled.”

This is the scandal of particularity. There is no other way to fulfillment as a human being. And that way is scandalous to our secular ears. We don’t want to hear it. It offends us and offends our sensibilities. Because, in the end, we want to reign on the thrones of our lives; we do not really want God to reign there. For then we might have to do some difficult things. We might have to say some uncomfortable words to our friends and families. We might have to really believe that we are not in control, but that God is. We might have to give Him all the glory.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” It is scandalous...but, do you really believe it?