

First Baptist Church of Augusta
John 14:1-11
In His Own Words: I am the Way
February 24, 2008
Lent 2008

NRS John 14:1 *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.*

*2 In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. 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, so that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And you know **the way** to the place 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 know me, you will know 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 we will be satisfied."

9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? 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; 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; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

Today marks the third Sunday within the Lenten season. We are listening to the Gospel of John and hearing what Jesus has to say, *in his own words*. Today, we come to the somewhat familiar story where Jesus is speaking to his anxious disciples. They are anxious because Jesus is making his way to the cross, the impending sacrifice, and death. Death has such disorienting affect, does it not? Do you remember the first time someone close to you died? Death leaves loved ones unfocused, unsteady, and, in a word, lost.

Jesus centers his disciples by telling them he is going to prepare a place and you will know how to get there. For Thomas, this was still confusing and he asked, *"Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"* Thomas speaks, I suspect, for most of us. We are immersed in a sometimes confusing bastion of choices, options, belief systems, and alliances. Thomas speaks for us when grief stifles us, when temptations flood us, and when failure finds us.

"Jesus, we don't know where you are going, we don't know the way." And so, Jesus says to Thomas, to the gathered disciples, and to each of us, *"I am the way, the truth and the life."*

Thomas' question, is a question of, where are you heading in life? Does it matter what path you take, whether you live honorably and honestly, or live for yourself? Does it matter, really matter, what you believe in? After all, if God is loving and good, do you think it is going to matter in what we believe about God?

What I am speaking of is pluralism. The term pluralism is brandished about quite a bit in religious circles. It simply describes that the world we live in is made up of countless belief systems, religions and faiths. According to a recent report by the CIA, the world is made up of the following religious groups: Christians 33.32 percent (of which Roman Catholics 16.99 percent, Protestants 5.78 percent, Orthodox 3.53 percent, Anglicans 1.25 percent), Muslims 21.01 percent, Hindus 13.26 percent, Buddhists 5.84 percent, Sikhs 0.35 percent, Jews 0.23 percent, Baha'is 0.12 percent, other religions 11.78 percent, non-religious 11.77 percent, atheists 2.32 percent (2007 est.). No one has to tell us how diverse the world is. And while diversity has helped enrich our appreciation of this world, it has also had the affect, thinning our own beliefs. Many are like over-worked kool-aid, served during the Vacation Bible Schools of years gone by – diluted and non-descript.

Pluralism itself, is the acceptance that all religions have something of truth in them that point to one supreme God. In other words, no matter what path one takes in life to God, they will all ultimately lead to God. The irony with pluralism is, however, that such a belief shows absolutely no commitment or faith whatsoever. It is the choice one makes when they don't want to think, when they don't want to commit, when they don't want to risk. And in a culture categorically marked by pluralism, not having to make a commitment is attractive indeed. The pluralist position takes on the role of observer instead of participant.

I believe that Jesus is the fullest and best expression of who God is. To know God, we need to look at Jesus. But as confessing Christians, we are not marching forward with a triumphalistic message that can be reduced to: "our God is better than your god," or something like that. No, if we truly believe our confession, that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, then we must **incarnate** this truth in our lives. Essentially, we must give concrete expressions of our confessions that Jesus is Lord, or we deny to the rest of the world the truth we claim.

Seven times in the book of Acts, the disciples of Jesus are described as people of "the Way." That is what following Jesus is all about. In Jesus, we find the Way. And if we are confident enough to tell unbelievers or people of other religions that our faith is the one, then we best be prepared to follow along the path that Jesus points to.

It reminds me of signs posted along the seminary campus I attended. Almost all public places have signs, and most of them usually begin with "No" and then, detail what it is exactly you are forbidden to do. Signs, like, "No Parking," "No Swimming," "No Fishing," "No Spitting," "No Kidding" come to mind. Perhaps you have entered a restaurant and read the sign: "No Shoes, No Shirt, No Service" (of course you would never read such a sign in any respectable BBQ stand.) I have had a few ideas for some negative signs. There should be a sign declaring a "No Whining" zone, buffered by a "No Complaining" perimeter. How about a "No Surly Attitudes," for some of you who have homes populated by, well, surly attitudes? I have always felt like a "No Excuses" sign might help keep things running smoothly.

When I was a student in seminary, we had a beautiful campus green right in the center. There were signs posted all around the perimeter: "Please, Walk on the Grass, But Don't Make Paths." Hey, now that is a sign I can live with. Not only is it positive, but it's pretty good theology.

By God's good design, we have been created and invited to travel through this life enjoying God's provisions. A path, however, is an imprint that scars not only lawns, but communicates to all those who follow "My way, is the way." The truth of the matter is, only Jesus can make that claim: "*I am the way, the truth and the life*" (John 14:6). Anytime we feel as though we have the corner market on how things are done, we are traveling perilously close to idolatry - we are making paths, scarring lawns, and discouraging others from doing anything different.

Church is an invitation to follow God's Way, (not Greg DeLoach's, or anybody else for that matter.) So please, come, walk on the grass, but don't make paths. That is a sign I can live with!

When Jesus said he was the way, he did not mean that we stand back and point to it with admiration and say, "Yep, that's the way alright. All you others that aren't going that way are wrong, wrong, wrong. You need to change directions and know the Lord." But if we fail to walk in the way of Jesus ourselves, we are little better than the disbelievers.

It is the difference between confessing the faith and professing the faith. Confession implies an acknowledgement that one's beliefs are intrinsically counter-cultural and revolutionary. Profession is declaring

that you accept these beliefs – the question of following these beliefs can be, I think, an entirely different matter. Forgive me, if I sound a bit too judgmental, but I believe that we have many who profess that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. But there are precious few who are willing to confess his Lordship.

Professing Christians are content enough to point to doctrine and statements of belief as proof that Jesus is “*the way, the truth and the life.*” Professing Christians hold up words of scripture to support the supremacy of Jesus.

When we engage people of different beliefs, or even of unbelief, and speak of what we profess of Jesus, we may make some difference. But chances are, they have professions too, based on whatever is authoritative to them. If it is a Muslim, it will be the Koran, if it is a Jew, it will be the Torah or tradition of Judaism; if it is an atheist, it may be secular humanism; if it is the patriot, then it will be the Constitution or Declaration of Independence.

But I am here to say, that profession of one’s belief is not enough. Words, left unattended are never enough. They are just words, and no matter how forceful they are delivered, will not fully change those of different beliefs. But confessing Christians go beyond the words. 1 John 3:18, *Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.* Even Jesus said this: *11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.* Jesus said in verse 11, that if we just cannot believe in the Godhead of Jesus, then look at the works themselves. And so, if we desire to communicate the message that Jesus is the way, then we best walk according to “the way.” “Intense love does not measure, it just gives” (Mother Teresa).

The journey in Jesus as “*the Way,*” takes us from profession, to confession, and ultimately to *testimony.* “*Go home to your friends, and tell them how much **the Lord has done** for you, and what mercy he has shown you*” (Mark 5:19). A testimony is a witness to what we have experienced and come to know in Jesus and how knowing Jesus has made a difference. What is our testimony of what we believe, and how our beliefs are lived out daily, because knowing Jesus has made a difference?

It is easy to simply stay on the professional side of Christianity: *I believe in Jesus, and that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and let’s just keep it at that?*

If we are going to be serious that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, if we choose to believe the words of scripture, especially Jesus’ own claim, that the way to God is by Him, then we must be more than a people who make bold professions. We must live confessionally, and life must give testimony and witness, that Jesus is who we claim him to be.

Jesus is the way, when life has diluted us and relativism has left us hopeless.

Jesus is the truth, and though we see through a glass dimly, our anchor is secure in him.

Jesus is the life, when the promises of materialism prove bankrupt, and the idolatry of empty security is vaporized in the light.

The Good News is how Jesus states this in his own words: *I am.* The world may breathe a collective sigh of relief, because salvation comes not by who is elected this November, not by the success (or failures) of our careers, and not by the accomplishments of our children. Jesus said: *I Am...*, and so He is, and we are His.