“I Am The Way, The Truth and The Life”
John 14:1-7

Let me set the stage. We’re in Jesus’ final week of earthly ministry, called his Passion Week; leading us from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. It’s Thursday evening. Jesus and his disciples are celebrating Passover in the upper room. We call this the ***last*** supper; because, within hours, that same night, Jesus will be arrested and by 9am the next morning, crucified. Talk about a crazy dinner. Did you notice when you read the text in John chapter 13? The disciples were unsettled. But, think about it, first Jesus, their master, their leader, washes their feet. Next, Jesus announces that one of the disciples will betray him. Can you imagine the confusion over this claim? Then there is a confusing exchange between Jesus and Judas Iscariot, identifying Judas as the betrayer and resulting in his departure from the group. None of the disciples can piece together that he is the betrayer or why he gets up and leaves. And if that weren’t enough, the disciples learn they are about to lose their beloved leader. Jesus tells the disciples he is leaving and not only that but he is going somewhere where they can’t go. Finally, as if to put the exclamation point on this unbelievable evening, the rock, Peter himself is told that he will deny Jesus, not once but three times.

No wonder the first verse in chapter 14 starts with Jesus’ words of assurance, “do not let your hearts be troubled…” You’ve got to guess that some of the disciples were still feeling pretty pumped about the amazing, triumphal entrance on Palm Sunday, just 4 days earlier, with everyone shouting and declaring Jesus as the king of Israel, others were probably just looking forward to a good meal, and then boom. Jesus drops this confusing bombshell – masters become servants, trusted friends fall away, and Jesus is leaving. No wonder the disciples needed some comfort and assurance.

Here’s how the conversation in the beginning of John 14 sort of played out. Jesus tells the disciples, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.”…It’s kind of like Jesus says, Trust me… “I am going to prepare a place in my father’s house for you.”… Don’t worry… I’m coming back to get you. And besides… “you know the way to the place where I am going.” But they don’t, or at least, in this overwhelming moment, at this perplexing dinner, they have lost their way. That is why Thomas, who is speaking for all the disciples, replies, “No we don’t, we have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

What they still don’t understand, is that this is not new. Jesus has been speaking to them of going this way, THE way, throughout his entire ministry. Jesus must go the way, before *becoming the* way for them and for the whole world. When Jesus speaks of “where he is going” he is speaking of his destination and his route. One of the great things that John has to offer is the foreshadowing throughout his gospel, and for a literary nerd like myself I love going back and reading John again and again and finding all of the events where Jesus speaks and acts, giving hints that lead up to this moment here in John chapter 14.

This isn’t the first time the disciples or us as readers have heard Jesus speak of his destination. He is going to God the Father. He said it in chapter 5 and 6 when he told the people he had come from God and was sent by him, and followed up in chapter 7 when he told the Temple guards who were reporting to the Pharisees, that he would be returning to the one who sent him. With the destination known, the route to the Father is starting to come to its final steps: A route that will be marked with betrayal, abandonment, humiliation, suffering, and ultimately death.

This radical I AM statement found in chapter 14 is the crowning statement. This claim ties the entire narrative together, where in the first chapter we see John the Baptist, making *the way* straight for the lord, followed by all of the Lord’s miracles, healings, teachings, revealing Jesus as God all of it, is leading up to *a way* that will be made for us to be reconciled to God, fulfilling the promises made throughout the old testament, and offering life both now and eternally to all who will call upon the name of the crucified and risen Lord.

Jesus told him, “I AM the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the father except through me.” Let’s unpack this radical claim even more.

The Greek word for *way* is ´οδός (hodos). It’s a word meaning way or road, and at the time of the Roman empire hodos was the term for the paved roads, that linked cities throughout the Roman empire, the term for little dirt paths that connected one village to another and it was also a metaphorical term for way of life, for example obedience to God as a way of life.

Similarly in English the word way can mean a variety of different things from method to style from behavior to desire, to the direction you’re going. For example: There are many delicious ways to make an egg, I love to watch the way she plays piano, have you noticed how he’s changed his way since dating her, it’s my way or the highway.

In regard to direction, there’s this way or that way, and there seem to be a lot of different ways to go. If you look at a mountain, there can be various ways to go up it. Some climb straight up, others ride up on their mountain bikes on a windy path, some even use a car and circle around it.

When it comes to other religions, the path or way to enlightenment or a form of heaven, is tread by YOU. YOU must find a way to the top of that mountain, either through works, money, or understanding; but that’s the goal: YOU find the way, YOU go the way, or as some say, any way will do as long as it works for YOU. What a burden! It’s all on YOU. And I don’t know about you, but if it is up to me to get myself to heaven, I am in trouble. I stumble and fall every day, like St. Paul who agonizes in Romans 7 (v. 15), “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” I try to love my neighbor, I try to change my bad habits, I try to do a lot of things to change my life. And Paul continues in verse 24, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”

The answer to Paul’s question, to my question, to your question; is Jesus, Just Jesus. He tells us that no one can come to the father, except through him. He is the way. Not a way, but the Only Way. Jesus bore the burden, Jesus did the work, Jesus paid the price – not you, not me, but Jesus. If our goal is to get to the father, to reach heaven, then the words of Jesus become either our saving grace or a stumbling block. For believers, Jesus is the way that people come to know and see God the father. Through his work on the cross and his resurrection He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, fulfilling the promise of Isaiah 42:16 in which God says, “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.”

Jesus is the way in which our relationship with the father has been restored. It is the way that God’s divine love is revealed and shown to us - Jesus radically changes everything. We couldn’t find the way on our own, we couldn’t climb the mountain, or earn his love, but he has descended to us, has become the way for us, and has freed us from the sin that entraps us and He brings us to the Father.

We can trust His radical claim, we can put our faith in Him because He is not only the way but also the Truth.

The Greek word for truth is ´αλήθεια (alethia) we first read this word *truth* in John chapter 1:14, where John tells us, that the word of God entered the world, became flesh and, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” and again in verse 17, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

The gospel then follows with testimonies, with signs and with discourses from Jesus as he shows and reveals his power and that he is the true son of God, and that he has come so that the world may know the truth of who God really is. God is one who stands by his promises and who loves his creation.

The word truth will come up again after this I AM statement, when Jesus stands before Pilate and Pilate asks him, “What is truth?” Jesus doesn’t respond with words, but rather he responds by going to the cross. At the cross we find this truth: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17). That is the truth, we can’t save ourselves, so God, through His son, set us free from the bondage to sin, and by the way of the cross and the resurrection the truth of God is revealed and Jesus Christ embodies that truth and in turn gives life.

The Greek word for life is ζωή (Zoe) and just like in our previous I AM statements like the bread of life or the resurrection and the life, True life means life in relationship with God our father, in the now and the not yet. Now meaning a Life that is purposeful and reflects the love of Jesus Christ, life that is spent in worship, study, and service; a life that is filled with the grace and joy and peace that only can come from Jesus. And Life in the not yet, meaning Eternal life that we will receive at our death, or when our Lord returns.

In chapter 3, John the Baptist, who has prepared the way for Jesus, who has testified to the truth of who Jesus is, now also testifies that whoever believes in the son will receive eternal life. Likewise, in Chapter 5 Jesus declares to the Jews who were trying to kill him that those who believe in him have passed from death to life already. Apart from Jesus there is no life. As you will see next week, when we are apart from Jesus we are apart from life, eternal life and this life that we live now. By his word, by his body and blood, and by the waters of baptism we are transformed and move from death to life, from a meaningless chasing of the things of this world, to a new creation, who lives in his grace and truth, who endures suffering and is ready to live this life doing the work that Christ has called us to do.

Ultimately, Jesus’ radical claim, “I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life” is a reflection of the entire Gospel of John which testifies to the Truth of the Way Jesus brought Life to the world. We respond to this radical ­­statement by putting our faith in Jesus Christ, we give testimony with our words and actions to the truth of what he has done for the world, and we live in love to God and our neighbor, and long for the day when we will be with him for all eternity.