

**Easter 5 - Year A  
20 April 2008  
Saint Anne's Episcopal Church  
Lee's Summit, Missouri**

**John 14:1-14**

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love. AMEN.*

So many of the words of today's gospel reading are familiar to us, aren't they?

**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 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?**

Words from our own Prayer Book liturgy for the Burial of the Dead and words used in many, many Christian funeral services by all denominations.

Jesus' declaration,

**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.**

And, Philip's request,

**Lord, show us the Father.**

And on and on. All in 14 verses of scripture.

So many familiar words, so much amazing material for us in consider in these 14 verses.

Of all the things we might look at this morning, I'd like for us to focus on verses 6 and 7.

What one writer has called the high point of John's theology.

**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

One of many of Jesus' "I am" statements in John's Gospel.

I am...the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate for the sheep; the Good Shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the true vine; the way, and the truth, and the life.

All of these are statements of what Jesus means in the lives of those who believe him to be God incarnate in human flesh, who believe that Jesus was the tangible presence of God in the world.

Of all these "I am" statements, I think this one we have read today may be the most difficult for us to interpret in our 21<sup>st</sup> century pluralistic world. The very clarity and decisiveness of this statement – **I am the way, and the truth, and the life** - have sometimes allowed people to turn these words into a weapon which can be used to bludgeon opponents, those who see things differently from them, into theological submission.

At a minimum, for some Christians to say, “Yes, yes, it’s okay for those who differ from me theologically and who believe they have found a different path to God to hold that view. They can hold that view, and I’ll hold God’s view.”

I think this weapon-like use of these words is indeed a mis-use – one that can be very dangerous - if we don’t look carefully at these words in their original context and then try to apply them in our own time and place.

So, let’s consider for a few moments what these words might have meant in the time and place in which they were written, what they might have meant to the community in which they had their origin.

For us today, the declaration in today’s Gospel reading can be heard as the sweeping claim of a major world religion. But, not so in its original context.

In that context, it was the conviction of a religious minority in the ancient Mediterranean world. It was the conviction of a religious group who had discovered that its understanding of the truth of God carried with it a great price.

This conviction had led them into conflict with Judaism, the religion of their ancestors.

The place that had been the only religious home they had ever known.

Their conviction that for them Jesus was the way, and the truth, and the life had forced them to carve out a new religious home for themselves, a home that had its very foundation in their belief that Jesus had indeed been God incarnate in human flesh, that Jesus was God's tangible presence in the world, that humanity's encounter with Jesus the Son made possible a new experience of God the Father.

In the unambiguous words of John 14:6-7, the writer of John's Gospel declares exactly where he and his community stood in the first-century intra-Jewish debate about who Jesus was. This debate ultimately ended in a division and complete separation of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.

With these unambiguous words, it is true that some boundaries were put in place. With these words, the writer of John's Gospel and his community said clearly, "This is who we are. We are the people who believe that God has been revealed to us decisively in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we have found truth and life. For us, Jesus is our destination and Jesus is the way to that destination, as well."

For us today in this place, I believe these words are also our confession. These words tell us and they tell those outside the boundaries that they put into place, "This is who we are."

When, I think, we can get into trouble, is in those times when we use these words as a weapon to get into a battle over the relative merits of the world's religions. And, when

we do this, I think we do as one writer has said – we distort the theological heart of these words.

You see John's Gospel was not concerned with the fate of Muslims, or Hindus, or Buddhists. It wasn't even concerned with the superiority or inferiority of Judaism and Christianity as they are configured today in the modern world.

No, these verses were the unambiguous, unashamed, joyous confession of a particular faith community who believed with their whole heart that they had received truth and life through the incarnation of God in the form of Jesus of Nazareth.

And so, for us today in this place just as in their original context, I believe that these words are not meant to be a weapon used to bludgeon those who differ from us. No, I believe that these words are primarily a mirror.

First, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" are words that form a mirror, allowing us to see who we truly are - people created in the image God who believe we have seen this very God incarnate in Jesus.

And, second, these words are a mirror that reflects the love of God as shown in the life of Jesus Christ and now in our lives to the world. A mirror that glows with the Light of the World – Jesus - and calls us now to be that light – an Easter people.

In Jesus, those of us who are Christians have seen the decisive revelation of God and of what God is like. This is the defining characteristic of what make us Christian. To be a Christian is to affirm, “In Jesus, I see more clearly than anywhere else what God is like.”

And, if that is what we confess with our mouths, then we must ask – what does that mean about how we live our lives? Well, I think it means that we live life as Jesus has taught us to live it. Loving God and loving neighbor. Living lives full of forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and joy - just as the God-centered and God-filled life that Jesus lived was full of forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and joy.

And, that’s where the mirror found in these words can begin to reflect God, as we believe God was embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, to the world.

Risen, living Christ, in you we know truth and life. In you, we find our destination and our way to reach it. By your grace, may we see ourselves as your Easter people in the world; to love God and to love our neighbors; to live lives of forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and joy that reflect you to others.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.