

## Message by Rev Mark Watt, EASTER 5, 10th MAY 2020 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

### John 14:1-14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>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?

<sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going." <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." <sup>9</sup>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'? <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup>I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Hymn "The church's one foundation" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jotNbcFelX4>

### SERMON

We are living in a world which is changing very quickly, especially with COVID19. What was culturally acceptable just a few weeks ago is now virtually forbidden.

- Have you tried to shake hands with anyone lately?
- How about giving a friend a hug?

These are cultural practices which we once took for granted. Not anymore!!

Culture is a funny thing. Barry Humphries (AKA Dame Edna Everidge) has made his name out of lampooning culture, especially Australian culture. It was not that long ago when there was an almost embarrassed approach to Australian culture. We called it 'cultural cringe.' When, compared to the refined ways of upper-class British mannerisms, we were seen as the country bumpkins. This meant that we tried to hide our natural mannerism, like swatting flies as we talk!

I think that this cringe can also be seen in the way that we act as Christians in this modern world. While we might not have given up our faith we tend to want to hide it from outsiders. It seems to me that sometimes we almost tend to give up our authenticity for fear of ridicule by outsiders. We might also try to step away from parts of the Gospel because we feel that outsiders will ridicule us. A prime example of this is the verse in this week's passage from John's Gospel.

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

So often when we hear statements like this one from Jesus it comes from Fiery Fanatics trying to use it as a blunt club to beat us into submission to their twisted vision of Jesus' message. For them, anyone who doesn't totally surrender to their dictates is going straight to hell. Naturally we tend to shy away from people like this as well.

Australian culture, very rightly, does not accept the dictates of people like this. We are a nation which more readily lives out the approach of peace and love in our dealings with others. Compare this with the dictates of a totalitarian regime like North Korea.

We tend to accept that everyone can have beliefs which could be worthy of respect, even if we don't agree. We don't want to be involved in some sort of Christian supremacist approach to others ideologies. Religious intolerance has a lot to answer for when we see the actions of groups like ISIS and we, very correctly, don't want anything to do with that sort of behaviour.



Having said that we equally need to have the conviction to be able to simply express our faith to others. Otherwise we are 'cutting off our nose to spite our face.' We don't want the fanatics to be the only voice heard in our community.

When Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."; he was not attempting to answer some person's questions about the comparative benefits of different faiths or the places where their adherents would end up. That would be distorting the statement.

The context of this passage in John's Gospel is that Jesus is sharing with his closest disciples because they were feeling uncertain about a future without Jesus. In this passage Jesus is giving his followers the confidence to carry on no matter what happens to him. If we look at the passages prior to this one Jesus has just told Peter that shortly he will end up denying three times that he even knew Jesus before the sun rises the next day.

John is sharing this insight with a community who have been thrown out from their traditional background in Judaism. They are being threatened with death and the loss of their families. In **Acts 7:55-60** we read that a painful death was common for the first Christians over the early centuries. They were being threatened in order to force them to disown their innovative Christian beliefs. There were tremendous pressures to comply with the existing traditional religious practices of their day. They were struggling to adhere to the evolving Christian identity and practices, even when John's Gospel was being finally formed, about 100 years after Jesus birth.

I wonder if our situation today is in some ways like those early believers. No longer do we take it for granted that Christianity is the accepted world view. Gone are the days of Christian triumphalism born out of an arrogant approach to the world around us. If we are honest we are surrounded by a myriad of different belief systems. Each has its own set of objectives and approaches to life and death.

In fact today we are very often confronted with a humanistic approach which seeks to diminish our Christian beliefs. Some humanist approaches want to take hold of aspects of our faith and try and make these the only objectives in life for everyone. It is a sort of sanitised belief system that they are promoting. This approach is one that lacks flavour, colour and depth. It is a push towards the lowest common denominator.

This leaves us with the need to live out our faith as a people of peace and justice. Jesus is not addressing a Hindu or Muslim faith and in fact he is not even trying to confront the Jews who did not believe in him.

His words are for his faithful followers who are feeling anxious and trying to find a way ahead in troubled times. For the audience that John wrote there was some confusion and anxiety in what to believe and what to let go of from their old days in the Synagogue. Jesus simply shares that they need to recognise that he is the life and the way. Today we are also in troubled times; we also need the confidence of Jesus' presence being available for us.

As we reflect here we return to: "No one comes to the Father except through me." It is in knowing God as the Father (Creator) that a child of God like you or me can come into a relationship which extends beyond life.

This is not a claim made in arrogance, rather it is a simple fact about how to relate to God. But we need to know that we can approach God as simply as following Jesus. It is unique and completely unprecedented concept. No funny actions, no intricate manoeuvres, no secret passwords, just simply follow Jesus. Only Jesus knows the way. He told us simply how to follow Him.

Please don't think that I am trying to diminish other radical and challenging ideas in the Gospels.

*Firstly:*

This particular passage doesn't make assertions about the supremacy of the Christian faith over others, however, it does not suggest that people are free to choose their own approach. Consequently not all faiths and belief systems are equal.

This passage does not address the issue of pluralism, so we shouldn't try to push it there. Our world today no longer takes Christianity as the norm.



We no longer take it for granted that people will grow up knowing very much about our faith. In the pluralist society that we live in there are so many competing views and opinions that Christ's message is often too scrambled for any casual observer to understand.

*Secondly:*

In view of the pluralism of our society the simplicity and innovation of Jesus' simple message comes to the fore.

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

We do not need to examine in detail the claims of Buddhism, or any other belief system. We are simply called to faithfully live out the genuine way of life that Jesus calls us to. Faithfully walking the path that Jesus set out for us allows us to simply become part of God's family.

By following that path we don't need to keep exploring the edges, the blind alleys or the rocky diversions. As we faithfully follow the way of Jesus we have no need to be hostile to people from other faiths, or even no faith. In doing this we become distinct and bold people who live out our faith without aggression. That is the best way to show others the power of God.

As we boldly and faithfully grow in our faith we develop an over-riding connection and communion with God and with one another. The approaches taken by many people with inflated personal images and seeking power and money then stand in direct contrast with our peace and confidence in God's love.

The radical hospitality that offers a welcome to strangers is a bold sign of faithfully following the risen Christ. As we boldly invest in the treasures of the Spirit we stand in direct contrast with people's obsession with share prices and the maximization of profits at any cost.

We are not following the simple way of Christ when we are taken in by the pressures to conform to the pluralistic pursuit of societies idols. Following the way of Christ is not just another disguise where we hide our faith in some diluted homage to other people's desires. We are not a community of the lowest common denominator. We are not a people of the latest fad in do-it-yourself spirituality.

When scripture talks of the 'way and the truth and the life' it is not suggesting that people should take advantage of just the aspects of faith which suits them the best. It is not a selection of the current ideas which they randomly select from different faiths as this just leads to complete confusion. No one would dream of trying to replace the wheels on our car with the legs on a horse! You can choose to go by horse or you can choose to go by car. We can't mix and match body parts any more than we can mix and match parts of our faith!

As humble Christians we are unapologetically trying to follow Jesus. We are not following Paul or Peter or any other member of Jesus band of disciples, even Zeus. We are part of the body of Christ fed by the presence of the Holy Spirit so that we might be sustained as we follow Jesus on the path to the Creator God who sent Jesus to simply guide us. We don't need to complicate the simple message from John by trying to create different paths over unknown ground.

The message is simple! We are invited to live out the way and the truth and the life made known to us by Jesus. Nothing more!

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

**Hymn "Seek ye first the kingdom of God"** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1Y8Naj3RFk>

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Loving God,

As we pause in our lives to consider your blessings, we firstly remember those who through love brought us into this world, especially our mother.

Some mothers fought to keep us alive many nurtured us in love, some even were unhappy with us. But we realize that no one can take away the time we spent so close to our mother, even before we were born.

Lord God, we thank you for mothers, we also thank you for the privilege of knowing that You are the perfect parent.



We think of people in our world who have had no one to care for them.

We ask that in your mercy and love you will guide caring Christian people to get alongside those in need of nurture.

We remember that Jesus came to befriend the lonely, heal the broken hearted and release those who are held captive by their own selfishness, hate and anger.

We also pray for those here in this Church.

Our friends and fellow worshippers, may we all be guided by your Spirit to show compassion to each other and those in need, in the name of Jesus our Saviour, Lord and friend.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

**Hymn "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyPT3IVSpmo>

### **BENEDICTION**

God's house has many rooms and God is always ready to welcome. As we go from this place, may we make room in our lives for those whom God gives us to love even the ones we least expect.

Go in the love and peace of God and the grace and goodness of the Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Amen.