

Sermon for Sunday, April 10, 2022
“The Way, the Truth, and the Life” | Palm Sunday
Pastor Charlie Berthoud | John 14:1-6

On the first five Sundays of Lent, we reflected on several of the “I am” statements of Jesus that we find in the gospel according to John. Jesus said, “I am....

- The bread of life
- The light of the world
- The vine
- The good shepherd
- The door for the sheep

Today we have one more “I am” statement, from John 14. Jesus says “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” It’s a wonderful image, especially for those of us who think of the Christian life as a journey. Jesus is the Way.

John 14 is part of the Farewell Discourse, the words Jesus offered as he approached Jerusalem, shortly before his arrest, trial, and death. Jesus was preparing his disciples for the time when he would no longer be physically present with them.

We often read the first six verses of John 14 at funerals, as it paints a picture of a gracious God welcoming people to a big house, with many rooms, many dwelling places.

But then there’s that last sentence, which I have pretty much stopped reading at funerals.

Listen for God’s word:

“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.

Thanks be to God for the words of Scripture.

That final sentence, “no one comes to the Father except through me” has sadly been used as make Christian faith, or a particular style of Christian faith, an exclusive secret society.

Only the people who relate to Jesus in a certain way have access to God’s love. You can interpret it that way if you want, and plenty of people do so.

In the Bible, you can find a verse to justify just about anything. So if you want to live in a dualistic world and draw a small circle including you and your friends while excluding others, you can do that.

I understand the appeal of clearly marked boundaries, of precise definitions, of a religion where we know exactly what is right and what is wrong. We like the simplicity of black and white, good and bad, in and out. Simplicity has its appeal.

But the world doesn’t usually work that way, and I don’t think Jesus operated that way.

Jesus routinely broke down the barriers that excluded people—welcoming those considered to be outcasts: foreigners, women and children, people who were sick or poor. Jesus seems to have taken the message of Genesis chapter one to heart, that we are all created good, in the image of God.

The Bible has abundant witness to a gracious, big, overflowing love of God that we regularly see in the words and deeds of Jesus.

- God “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:4
- Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:2
- “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.” Luke 2:10
- For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16

God’s love is bigger than we can imagine.

So I’ve reached a point in my journey of faith where I see myself as a committed follower of Jesus, as someone who strives to be a Christian, as someone who affirms that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life for me,

But at the same time, I have a sense of humility, recognizing that God’s love is a lot bigger than my understanding, or the Presbyterian tradition, and the Christian faith.

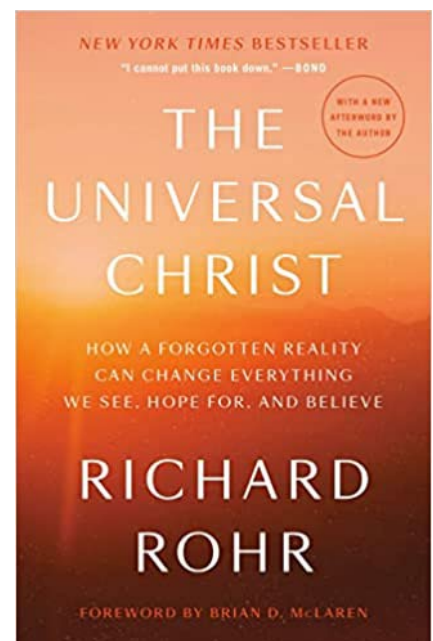
Sadly, too many people see Christian faith about having the right belief in order to earn a place in heaven. Authentic Christian faith is about sharing God’s love here and now, with everyone.

In his book *Universal Christ* Richard Rohr writes:

“Christians are meant to be the visible compassion of God on earth more than ‘those who are going to heaven.’” Richard Rohr, in *The Universal Christ*, page 148

Jesus proclaimed the radical love of God and his big arms of welcome alienated the elites of the day. His graciousness toward the outcasts was a major factor leading to his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

The religious and political leaders in Jesus’ time didn’t like the idea of God’s love for everyone. They wanted



boundaries. They wanted some people “in” and some people “out.”

Some religious and political leaders today feel the same way.

We live in a bitterly tribal world, where we are drawing more and more boundary lines and pointing fingers at “them” all the time.

One place we see this exclusionary thinking right now is with lesbian, gay, and transgender people, who are still being marginalized by certain religious and political leaders. Some school districts are dehumanizing LGBT people by prohibiting classroom discussion of sexuality and gender identity, and too many religious institutions still condemn anything beyond heterosexuality.

Depression and suicide rates for LGBT teens are alarmingly high, because they’ve internalized these messages of exclusion, intolerance, and hate.

This is not the way of Jesus.

Jesus came to show us the way to something new—the new reality in the Kingdom or Realm of God, a welcome for those who were forgotten and mistreated, and the reality of God’s love for all people.

And by the way being self-righteous with our inclusive perspective and bitter toward those who aren’t as “enlightened” as we are is not the way of Jesus either.

On Palm Sunday, we remember Jesus going to Jerusalem, as a very different kind of King, facing the political and religious leaders with his message of inclusion and love. He models courage, compassion, and sacrificial love.

We wave our palm branches and we sing about Jesus as King, but when we leave here, we’ll have to decide if we want to follow in the way of Jesus.

Let us pray:

Loving God, save us from narrow and exclusive thinking, and set us free for a life of purpose and meaning. Grant us wisdom and courage to follow Jesus in the way of service, compassion, and sacrificial love.