

A Spiritual Journey - The Gospel of John
"The Way, The Truth, The Life"
Part 2

"The Way, The Truth, The Life" is found almost in the middle of this Gospel when we are told that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." I see this centering verse as a summary of the Spiritual Journey we share as John, through metaphor and allegory, tells us how Jesus, as word and verb, shared God and the Realm that God wanted for our world.

The early Christians were called "Followers of the Way" and Jesus portrayed the way, in word and deed, how God's Kingdom would be among us. God's love and compassion was demonstrated for all humanity wherever Jesus went with his disciples. He was training them so that we also might be trained in God's ways to be followers of Jesus today. Jesus became the Christ, the anointed one, who was sent into the world of the new Common Era as it marked a new beginning for a renewal of God's Realm among us.

Having previously shared the first 11 chapters of John wherein Jesus, through signs, previewed "The Way", today I wish to discuss "The Truth and The Life". In the middle section, chapters 12 to 17 often referred to as the Discourses of Jesus with his disciples, John presents the "what's happening now". In these chapters John reflects on the words and actions of Jesus regarding the politics and religion of the time with those close to him. As John recalls these intimate moments with his disciples, having written this Gospel around the turn of the first century of the new Common Era, he tells us something about the turmoil of this time as well. It is how this fourth Gospel can help us to see how the life and teaching of Jesus is still useful when circumstances are conflicting and unsettled in our lives today.

The truth is that there was turmoil, politically and religiously, when Jesus was alive, but even more so at the turn of the first century in the Common Era some 60 years after Jesus. There was a growing variety of thought and practice among religious Jews, a growing split among the Jewish/Christian followers, and a growing and intentional separation of Christians from their Jewish roots. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE there were

several Jewish parties like the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, and others. At the turn of this first century of the Common Era, John wants us to see how these discourses with his disciples are valuable around 100 CE and afterward. John uses a form of allegory when Jesus uses the phrase "I Am" and follows that picture with "You Are". This is to make it clear that what Jesus is, we as his followers, are to be as well. Having heard these in previous homilies I will simply list them for recall...

- "I Am the door" - You Are doors or gateways to invite everyone into a living relationship with God.
- "I Am the good shepherd" - You Are shepherds to care for all people needing love and compassion.
- "I Am God's Son" - You Are sons and daughters of God since God is in us and we are in God.
- "I Am the light" - You Are to be lights that are not hidden.
- "I Am the bread of life" - You Are bread in this world.
- "I Am the vine" - You Are the branches to bear much fruit.
- In fact Jesus tells us, "In very truth I tell you, whoever has faith in me will do what I am doing; indeed you will do greater things still because I am going to the Father."

Obviously, even today, there is plenty of turmoil and division, politically and religiously, in our world. If we claim to be followers of Jesus the Gospel of John makes it clear, in these discourses, what following Jesus means. These allegorical scenarios make crystal clear what our mission is and how we are to go about our work. To announce and establish the Realm of God Jesus called disciples to follow him in word and deed. The disciples were to continue this process by inviting and training others to be "followers of the way" of Jesus to bring God's care and compassion for all people in all times and places.

After we are shown "The Way" and "The Truth" of God's Realm for this world, we are promised "The Life" for our present and future. It is clear that those who follow Jesus have their work cut out for them and it is not always easy. In the long prayer of Jesus in chapter 17, before his coming death, Jesus prays for those who followed him, **"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are**

not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." Jesus also makes it clear that his prayer was not only for those who were alive with him then, but for all who would be future followers of the way. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."

John continues in chapter 18 to explain the faithfulness of Jesus to fulfill God's plan to expose the evils of those who promote their kingdom of this world. The false authority of humans who believe that their governments are primary and fair mainly enforce honor and loyalty for themselves. It is also made true that religious leaders, to keep their power and authority, bowed to being cooperative with their governments of rule. Jesus, as he was judged by them, declared that only God was our rightful authority and judge. The verses that summarize the political and religious attitude may be these, "12) Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him 13) and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. 14) Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people." These words of Caiaphas were first given to us by John in chapter 11.

Remember, Jesus was not trying to draw attention to himself but, as the "word" and "verb" of God, demonstrate the reality of eternal life as seen in the resurrection. How could the people in John's day begin to describe this truth that is even hard for us to explain or understand with our growing knowledge of the universe about energy and matter that cannot be created nor destroyed - conveyed in Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Perhaps this meditation of a Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr, says it best:

Resurrection as the Revelation of What Was Always True

In the Risen Christ, God reveals the final state of all reality. God forbids us to accept "as-it-is" in favor of "what-God's-love-can-make-it." To believe in Resurrection means to cross limits and transcend boundaries. Because of the promise of the Resurrection of Jesus we realistically can believe that

tomorrow can be better than today. We are not bound by any past. There is a future that is created by God, and much bigger than our own efforts.

We should not just believe in some kind of survival or immortality or just “life after death”—but Resurrection, an utterly new creation, a transformation into Love that is promised as something that can happen in this world and is God’s final chapter for all of history. That is why a true Christian has to be an optimist. In fact, if you are not an optimist, you haven’t got it yet.

Adapted from Radical Grace: Daily Meditations, Day 159, p. 150 (Available via Franciscan Media)

Another of Richard Rohr's thoughts make for a fitting closing:

"Life and Death Are Not Two. Let us look at the phenomenon that some have called “falling upward.” The very activity we discern in the planets and evolution seems to be that through loss, crisis, stress, limitation—use whatever word you want—we move into deeper states of consciousness and freedom. I think even physicists today would say that actual loss is not real. Nothing totally dies. There is only transformation.

The common metaphor is that the liquid world is moving to solid, then to vapor, and eventually back again. Just wait a while. It looks like a death, a loss in each case, but in fact it is a becoming. Now we recognize that spiritual teachers were saying this all along. In Christianity it was called “the Paschal Mystery”—a phrase used by Saint Augustine to teach the paradox that dying must precede resurrection. Jesus, for Christians, became the Icon and living image of that mystery. Christians believe that his crucified body in fact transmuted, transformed into the risen Christ, and he is a stand-in, a corporate personality for all of creation. He holds the two sides of life together in one hopeful place."

Adapted from The Art of Letting Go: Living the Wisdom of St. Francis (CD)

Listen to the earliest writings in Christian Scripture from 1 Corinthians 15..

51) Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 53) For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54) Now when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will happen,

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

55) “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

Let us pray -

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God’s love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.