

Jesus is the WAY

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Easter 5A & John – Apostle and Evangelist– John 14 1-14

The Gospel we just heard comes from what scholars call St John's *Book of Glory*. It's where Jesus is preparing his inner circle of disciples for a future without him physically present with them. The *Book of Glory* begins with the beautiful passage in ch 13 that we read on Maundy Thursday. That's where Jesus washes his disciples' feet to teach about servant leadership, where he gives the meal that we call Holy Communion, and where he teaches the new commandment – to love as he did – so everyone will recognise him in us.

Entering the *Book of Glory* feels like going on retreat after the drama of earlier chapters where Jesus' ministry is constantly opposed. Now, he's in the upper room with his friends as they gain their first inkling that he won't be with them for much longer. Unlike his earlier challenges to his detractors, his words here are words of comfort for his friends; words of hope. *Do not let your hearts be troubled. ... I go to prepare a place for you ... so that where I am, there you may be also.*

Here, Jesus is speaking to his closest followers; people on the Way with him. They're not the people we met in previous chapters who seek to cancel Jesus and damage his reputation. It's important to bear in mind who he's speaking to because when we get to verse 6, some people who read today's passage see it as very challenging; very exclusive. Jesus says, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

No one comes to the Father except through me. I'm stressing this issue of context and audience because I meet people who hear these words as Jesus shutting them out. (I don't know

him, so I must be out) I also meet people who assume that Jesus is letting only them – true believers – and people like them into God's presence. They assume everyone else is out – even other Christians they disagree with. Both these people hear Jesus drawing a line in the sand to exclude most of the world's people. But I'm sure John the Evangelist did *not* think Jesus was saying that.

In that room with his friends, and in John's gospel overall, Jesus is always found stretching that line in the sand into an ever larger circle to bring the whole world in. How often can you remember him talking and eating with outsiders, touching diseased people? He's breaking down barriers. He wants these people to see their way open to God's presence. He's offering hope. That's the Jesus our patron John wants us to encounter. In the opening verses of John's Gospel, we read, *All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*^{1:3-5} The closest parallel to this statement I can think of is that Jesus is our parent – and we simply can't ever stop being our parents' children. It's who we are.

John is presenting Jesus to us as the source of our being, and that's a total embrace. I can't imagine Jesus wanting to exclude anyone. He became one of us to show us how intimately we are identified with him. He became one of us to reveal to the whole world the Way to the Father. Of course there are also verses in John's Gospel which say that a person's faith, belief and trust in Jesus are required. But there's a clear vision for the salvation of the whole world in this Gospel. And the Gospels are written in the context of the Abrahamic faith which tells us that through Abraham and Sarah's descendants, all families of the earth would be blessed.^{Gen}

^{12.1-4.} And Christians believe Jesus is *the* direct descendant of Abraham and Sarah by whom that promise is fulfilled.

So personal, informed faith, or Jesus does it all anyway? What do I preach?

I often find myself choosing the *Jesus does it all* – message. At funerals, the Gospel is usually John 14.1-6. Often we're farewelling someone I don't know, and their grieving family can't tell me about the faith of their loved one with any confidence. Their faith is now known to God alone. My choice then is to publicly commend them to God in the Christian hope that Jesus came to bring *them* to the Father too.

I think it's legitimate for me to do that because in John 14, we see that even Jesus's closest friends suffer from spiritual blindness and doubt. Thomas wonders where Jesus might be leading them and Philip hasn't worked out who Jesus truly is. But Jesus is gentle with them both. Both of them are seeking God; both of them feel out of their depth. But Jesus holds them fast. So whoever we are, I believe we can also trust Jesus, *the light of all people*, to be gentle with each of us – and with everyone.

So I preach the Christian hope at funerals of people whose faith is known to God alone. I do this because I know God showed his love for the whole world – before any world-wide faith was formally articulated – by giving us Jesus. ^{Jn 3.16} I do it because throughout his ministry, Jesus was open to people outside his own faith and nation. He had time for traitors, liars, immoral people, criminals and stupid people. And even if they walked away from him, he kept loving them. I know that through personal experience; it's as though he has a finger through your belt loop and his arm extends endlessly.

I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. I believe Jesus came to make a Way for the world to come to the Father who *loves* the world, so I will proclaim that hope. We can all proclaim that hope. We're all embraced here – not excluded. Not only are Jesus and the Father one, but if we seek the Father – if we see our life as

a spiritual journey to unity with God, here Jesus reveals himself not only as our travelling companion, but also as the very road he travels with us, and our destination. He is the WAY.

No one comes to the Father except through me? Of course not – but Jesus and the Father are one. And in Jesus, the Father has come to us; come for us. I don't think anyone or anything can stand in their WAY. Amen