

'I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life'

Easter 5 (A)

Written by Penny Duffy

May 7, 2023

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life," Jesus says to his disciples as he tries to reassure them that all will be well despite his impending death. *The way, the truth, and the life*. Two thousand years later, we still use that phrase in our worship and in our lives.

I am the way — I am the path forward to a full and rich and meaningful spiritual life; I am the way to something beyond human understanding. I am the way to God.

I am the truth— I am all that is true and nothing that is not true. Jesus isn't talking about false prophets. He's saying that he simply IS truth.

I am the life—not a life, but *the* life. He is life-giving, life-sustaining, life everlasting.

The way, the truth and the life. Profound. Definite. Sustaining. Let those words surround you, fall deeply within you.

But, as we heard in John's Gospel, Jesus has more to say, and what he says is this: "*No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Whoa. What are we, as Christians in the 21st century, or any century for that matter, to make of this apparently exclusionary statement? That the *only* way to God is through Christ? That eternal life is reserved for those who believe in him? That those who don't believe in him are doomed to live without God in their lives? Certainly, that is exactly what a great many Christians believe. It is the foundation of attempts to convert those of other religions to Christianity. From it come words like "heathen," and "believers" versus "sinners." Humans, it seems, are destined to remain tribal.

Or are we? Tribalism is the exact opposite of Jesus's message. Remember that, at the time he was trying to comfort his followers, there was no Christianity, no church, no cross, no resurrection. When Philip asks to "see" the Father, Jesus says, you already have and it is me. His exact words are, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

And that, I think, is the fundamental message. Jesus IS God. Albeit in relatable human form. There is no separation. When Jesus says that the only way to the Father is through me, it sounds like he's setting himself up as a broker or intermediary between us and God. But no, what he's saying is that he IS God — God is in him and he is in God. To believe in one is to believe in the other. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Coequal. Coeternal. Three in one. The only way to God is through God.

It's not about whether you believe in Jesus as your personal savior. It's not about dividing the world up into the saved and the unsaved. It is about finding God. It is about the most fundamental of all questions: Is this life just a jumble of random gestures, or is there something greater, something unknowable, something sustaining that is at the integrated heart of it all? If so, how can we find it?

Jesus tells us exactly how to find it: He is the way, the truth and the life. He is God revealed — in what he said, what he did, and how he lived. Every bit of his life was toward connection and unity — through humility, compassion, forgiveness, loving his enemies, caring for those in need, and by putting aside earthly, material concerns of money and status and power and belonging to a given tribe. God is the path to life expanded — beyond the narrow boundaries of ego and self. When we seek God, we are seeking out what sustains us; when we turn away, we are in negative space: bereft, alone, empty, cynical, and lost. And

so we seek again. We renew our faith; here in this quiet space, we gather together and pray. Prayer is but one way to experience God — but it is a powerful one.

Let me give but one example. There is someone, here among us, who is kind of like a radio tower with a blinking light, receiving and transmitting messages. Independent of the prayer requests sent by Calvary, she transmits prayer requests that she's received to a group of her friends. The needs are very specific. Sometimes for people she knows; sometimes for people she only knows of. She's the kind of person people confide in, even when they hardly know her. She is the kind of person who is deeply attentive and attuned and spiritual. Those on her list are struggling. Maybe they're going through a major medical crisis, or have lost a loved one, or have a pet in trouble; maybe they are trying to find their way out of addiction and a life of chaos, or have recently renewed their faith. All of them are on a journey both figuratively and literally. The messages come in whenever the need arises, depending on what falls across her radar. And when that random email arrives in your inbox, it makes you stop; makes you read those names, consider that situation; makes you step outside yourself; makes you bow your head and pray, if only for a moment, for someone you most likely do not know.

This ministry is, of course, as much a gift to you as to those you pray for. Why? Because those prayers connect you more consciously to the great river of love that is God. They take you out of yourself, and you are floating on that current, and, arms around those you're praying for, you are holding them in the life ring of your heart. You are weightless, buoyant, and unbound by earth's pull — its petty concerns, its tribalism, self-focus, and materialistic goals. Maybe it helps you grow beyond yourself so that you're just that much more willing to recognize God within yourself, to forget past hurts and resentments, your own regrets, and live life in the here and now.

As the poet Mary Oliver put it at the end of her poem, "To Begin With, the Sweet Grass:"

"... And I have become the child of the clouds, and of hope.
I have become the friend of the enemy, whoever that is.
I have become older, and cherishing what I have learned,
I have become younger.

And what do I risk to tell you this, which is all I know?
Love yourself. Then forget it. Then, Love the world."

We are human. We are earthly. God knows this. We are limited in our understanding, and so must rely on faith, the faith that we are part of something vast and magnificent — an eternal, boundless force of renewal that is God. Jesus was the physical and spiritual embodiment of that force of renewal, here to help us understand the living God of before time and of all time.

Jesus tells his disciples one simple, yet unbelievably complex message. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life. I am in God and God is in me. No one can come to God except through God.*

And the way to find God, whether you believe in Christ or have never heard of him, is to act in ways that expand you — to be those eyes that see, those ears that hear, that hand reaching out — to others, to the natural world around you — and by reaching down into your own beating heart to find the best of yourself, that *holy essence*. In that way you are experiencing the divine. Not with your mind, but with your very being. You are honoring God by sustaining life. You are knowing God as the disciples knew Jesus. And *you* are part of *the way, and the truth, and the life*. Amen.

--Penny Duffy