

"The Great 'I Am'"

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John 14:1-14

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¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In 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? ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus 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?' ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹Believe 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. ¹²Very 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. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Prayer.

There is a period fast approaching, near the end of the semester or school year, that is often referred to as "Review Week." It is the time at the end of the course, when the teacher draws together all the important material from previous weeks and uses it to prepare the students for their final exam or paper. Special review classes may be added. Office hours may be extended by the professor. Teaching assistants make themselves more readily available in the lab or library. It is an intense time of cramming when everyone knows the end is near. Apprehension fills the air. Some would be sad that the course was ending. Others anticipated the joy of walking out of the exam room knowing that it was over.

Much the same environment existed for Jesus and His disciples in the weeks preceding his final trip to Jerusalem, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus knew he was not going to be physically present much longer; His earthly work and mission would have come to a successful conclusion. And it was time for His disciples to be set free.

The Gospel of John, specifically John 13:31 – 17:26, records much of this final review period. It is unparalleled in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Yet, John felt it important to include, much to our benefit. Scholars call it “The Farewell Discourse.” These rich scripture passages are filled with characteristic promises and commands of Jesus. Indeed, the theological and homiletical ground is fertile for modern day preachers and priests.

As we take a look at this one piece of the Farewell Discourse this morning, there is one additional piece of historical fact that influences the way the Church has come to interpret these words of Jesus. The departure of Christ was the first major crisis of the Church. He ascended into heaven, but he left behind His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to come and empower His disciples. They were instructed to fan out throughout the known world; be deployed to start the Church. When Jesus left, He promised to return. As the first few generations of early Christians began to pass and Jesus failed to return, disciples panicked. They were aware of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their midst, but where was Jesus? As the Church adapted to this early crisis, developing the many doctrines and traditions we now hold to be true, our understanding of the Farewell Discourse has changed and matured. Certainly, this would have been the plan of an Omnipotent God.

The time was near, and there was so much to review.

Jesus gathered His beloved disciples, His closest students and associates. He sought to give them the highlights, the most important elements of truth that would best serve them in the coming years.

Almost entirely lost in the translation from the Greek to English is the emphasis Jesus places in his opening response to Thomas' question. He says, “**I Am the way, the truth, and the life.**” (John 14:6) **Ego eini** it reads in the Greek, that is: “I am ... to be, I exist, I happen, I come to pass.” (Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, George Ricker Berry, 1897).

Jesus is wise enough to draw these words from the past, from the Hebrew found in Torah, **Hayah** (hae-yaе), when Moses asks God for a name, and the voice

responds "I Am." **Hayah** was transformed by Jewish scribes, who feared writing the name of God, into **Yahweh**. Jesus is the Great 'I Am.' Jesus is one and the same as Yahweh. (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, #1961 in the Hebrew, 1890)

When Jesus says, "**I Am the way, the truth, and the life**" he is making an intentional identification with the God of creation, covenant, law, and prophets. Jesus and the Father are one, as He pointed out to Philip. "**I am in the Father and the Father is in me;**" (John 14:11). Unlike the Gospel of Mark, which highlights Jesus' desire to keep His Divinity a secret, here today we hear Jesus speaking with exceptional clarity, describing who He is and why He has come.

When time is short, one has to be frank and bold.

Jesus and the God of our experience are one-and-the-same. To loose our Savior's razor focus, or to water this down this essential Christian Truth, would be to miss the train while standing on the platform arguing whether or not the train will ever come.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus wants it as simple as that. It is His Divine assurance to a world that often finds itself lost and astray from the path, arguing and waffling over what is true, and asleep to the reality that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

"**I Am the way, the truth, and the life**" Jesus tells us.

The Way – *odos* in the Greek, meaning: the way, the road, progress on the journey (Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, George Ricker Berry, 1897). Jesus does not merely point to the way, He is the Way. There are a lot of people lost in today's world, who may have once been on the right track, or who may have never been shown the right way, but who are now desperately seeking to find their way in life. If I had the time, I'd tell you about every last one of them!

Consider those who look for answers in new age spirituality, mysticism, astrologers, fortune tellers, and the like ... all with the same relative moral justification of "what harm can it do? I'm just covering all my bases." Consider those awash in the trappings of more money, bigger and better houses, cars, or things ... all with the same hedonistic consumptive character we know as greed and gluttony.

"I've been searching for my way in life, pastor, throughout my entire life," one confessed to me. "I've just never been able to find my way." Well, hello! Jesus

tells us that He is not only the one who points to the way, but He is the Way. Join with Him, and your search, your wandering days, will be over.

"I Am the way, the truth, and the life" Jesus tells us.

The Truth – *aletheia* in the Greek, meaning "freedom from error, truthfulness, veracity, sincerity, and integrity." (Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, George Ricker Berry, 1897). There is no error in Jesus, no inconsistency, no deviation, no moral relativism that conveniently speaks to the singular crisis of the moment.

This is what cuts all competitor's to Jesus' Lordship down to size. Be it Buddha's influence four centuries before Jesus, Simon bar Kokba in the 1st Century, Mohammad in the 6th Century, Joseph Smith in the 19th Century, or Jim Jones or David Korish in the last Century – they all fall short of the absolute truth and purity of Christ.

We would be foolish to say that Jesus is the only true revelation of God, or to preclude that God hasn't acted in any other way; but to us, and for us and our experience, only Jesus is elevated to to complete truth and sinlessness. When He tells us that He is the Way and the Truth, He means it. And we should take Him seriously.

Only a perfect Savior would atone Himself on our behalf. Only a sinless Messiah would show us how to live righteously. Only a loving God would give us Life.

"I Am the way, the truth, and the life" Jesus tells us.

The Life – *zoe* in the Greek, meaning "life; literal, spiritual, and eternal life." (Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, George Ricker Berry, 1897). Our awakening is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He who was once dead is now alive! This is the Easter message. And when we join Him in the Way, and we recognize Him by His Truth, then we also share with Him eternal life. Not sometime in the future; right here and now.

We share in Christ's salvation already. All that is necessary is for us to claim it, to lay hold of it, to make it our own. This is God's greatest gift of grace to us. It's magnitude only gives us an inkling of the vastness of God's love for us. Victory over the grave gives us the self-confidence to not be swayed by fear, lore, legend, or superstition. Knowing that we've been granted eternal life gives us confidence in death, it takes the sting of death away, and enables us to live always prepared to die.

Oh, we would like to withhold life from selected people, people we don't like or get along with, people who are evil or mean, people who treat us bad. But His ways are not our ways. His heart is larger than ours. His Kingdom includes all God's children. Jesus is Life! In Him there is no more death, no more darkness, only light and life.

Through Jesus, His Spirit breaths life into our lungs. The life giving oxygen from the Creator's hand is just as real as the life giving breath of the Holy Spirit; and it is just as certain as the Eternal life that we've inherited, by the mere fact that we are God's own children.

"I Am the way, the truth, and the life" Jesus tells us.

Our passage for this morning concludes with an assuring promise: Whoever believes in Jesus AND follows in His way HAS the power of His name. You heard me right; look at it right there in your Bibles - **"If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."** (John 14:14)

Jesus doesn't slice ethical hairs here. He doesn't distinguish between "needs" and "wants" as we are so prone to do. It flat out promises that anything – anything at all – we ask for in His name, it will be done for us.

The rub, of course, is asking in the name of Jesus. Money? It doesn't appear to anything that Jesus ever wanted. In fact, the case can be made for quite the opposite ... especially if you're a rich man looking at the eye of a needle. Things? Don't even bother asking. Who doesn't recall His directive to the rich young man? – go sell all that you have and give it to the poor. Power? Ha! Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and return to God what is God's.

Healing of broken relationships? Ah, now we're getting somewhere. Forgiveness begins in Galilee and peeks on the cross. Love is born in Bethlehem and finds it's full satisfaction in an empty grave.

Healing of broken bodies? Sometimes; Jesus repaired some who were lame, restored some who were blind, even rose a few from the dead, but only to have them die another day. Healing of broken bodies must include the healing that comes from the eventual death of our flesh, and our stepping through the portal into God's heavenly, eternal life.

"I Am." Jesus proclaims.

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Jesus teaches.

"Ask for anything in my name, my precious name, and it will be given to you."

Jesus assures.

My beloved, rest assured in these three things; these three essential Truths of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and our Savior.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me this day. Thanks be to God. Amen.