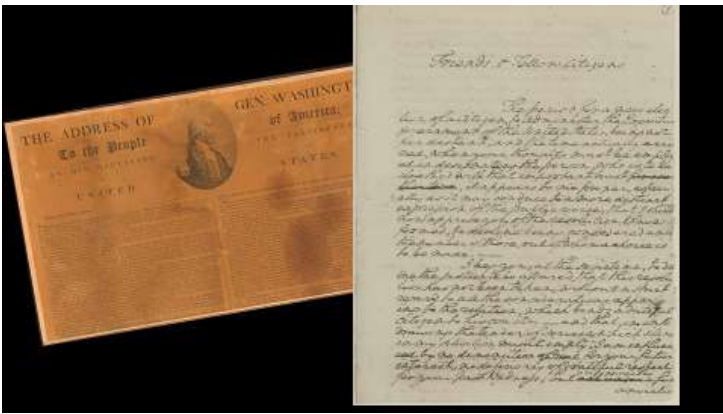




# The Jesus Way

Vienna Presbyterian Church  
The Rev. Dr. Peter G. James  
John 14:1-11

March 12, 2017



President Obama delivered his farewell speech, in case anybody was listening, in January to a hometown gathering of friends and supporters in Chicago. The custom of a president giving a farewell address dates back to our first

president. In 1796 George Washington printed his farewell address in a Philadelphia newspaper announcing he would not seek election to a third term. Yet unlike most presidents, including Obama, who tout their accomplishments, Washington devoted his speech to America's future. Much like a Biblical prophet, Washington warned against accumulating national debt and the division political parties engender. He also cautioned against what he called "the wiles of foreign governments" which is almost eerie, given our current debate over possible Russian interference. He also heralded religion and morality as "indispensable supports to political prosperity."

It was the most momentous speech for the first 150 years of American history. It appeared in print more often than the Declaration of Independence itself. It occupied a critical place in public education. Only in recent years has Lincoln's Gettysburg Address eclipsed its importance. Given the rancor on our city, methinks it ought to be required reading for anyone on Capitol Hill right about now!

We find ourselves in a portion of John's gospel called Jesus' farewell discourse that spans four chapters of John's gospel. Jesus' public ministry is now over. He knows his earthly days are numbered. Jesus' purpose in this farewell address is to prepare Jesus' disciples for his imminent departure. These four chapters of John 13-17 read much like Jesus' last will and testament.

Today's reading contains one the most famous and controversial statements spoken by Jesus, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14.6). Is Jesus really the only way to God. Can we say that any longer? Hold that thought. We'll come back to it later.

Stan preached last Sunday on the John 13 story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Stan must have said twenty times Jesus took a towel. We take a towel. After washing their feet, Jesus announces, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer...Where I am going, you cannot come" (13.33-34).

Peter asks, "Lord, where are you going?" (13.36) Jesus answers, "Where I am going, you cannot follow, but you can follow me later."

Jesus expresses tenderness to his disciples



at the outset of John 14, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me”



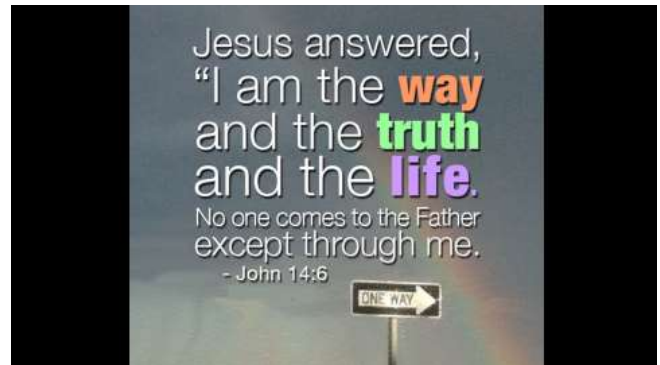
(14.1). The language of “believe in God; believe also in me” consists of two grammatically balanced imperatives. Believe equates to “trust” in John’s gospel so literally the sentence reads, “Trust in God; trust also in me.”

Jesus continues, “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am. You know the place where I am going” (14.3-4). Chapters 13-17 of John read much like Jesus’ last will and testament.

Now it is Thomas’ turn to ask, Lord, we do not know where you are going. So, how can we know the way?” (14.5)

Jesus answers, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (14.6).

Jesus’ disciples assume the place he is referencing here must be to some geographical place. Rather, the place where Jesus is going is back to the Father. It has no geographical boundaries. The place to which Jesus refers is the where God dwells. Later in this same chapter, Jesus says we have access to this same place by means of the Holy Spirit that Jesus will give to his followers.



Some Christians choke on Jesus’ words, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” Is Jesus really saying that he is the only way to God? Is it not a foregone conclusion in post Christian America that there are many ways to God?

There are points of agreement among world religions. Every world religion espouses the value of loving God and people. To be fair about it, there are also points of substantial disagreement among world religions.

Take Jesus as a case in point. Christians assert Jesus Christ is the Messiah Son of God. Other world religions deny Jesus to be the Messiah Son of God. According to the law of non-contradiction, both viewpoints cannot be simultaneously true. Either Jesus is the Messiah Son of God or



he is not. The only way we can embrace two radically different truth claims is to airbrush their differences away.

The fundamental difference in world religions comes down to this: do we come to God or does God come to us? Most world religions teach practices and devotions as a way to approach God. The five pillars of Islam and the Buddhist eightfold path are ways people can draw near to God. Christianity begins in the opposite direction. God comes to us. This is what God does in Jesus Christ. God comes in Christ to redeem and save.

There are elements of truth in other religions. There are commendable practices to emulate. Other religions are worthy of our respect. Yet with all humility, Scripture declares that God offers the world something unique in Jesus Christ, found in no other.

I do not intend to expend all my airtime on whether or not Jesus is the only way to God. While this question is important, there is a more essential question. Is Jesus Christ your way to God?

“I am the way, the truth and the life” represents one of Jesus’ I Am declarations. “I am the way” sets the tone for everything that follows.



The two words that come later in the sentence, truth and life function in a supporting role. In English, we call this an appositive. The first noun conveys the main idea while the remaining nouns serve to amplify it. What Jesus is essentially

saying is that I am the true and living way. I am the Jesus way that leads to truth. I am the way that leads to life.

Thomas a Kempis wrote about this verse 600 years ago in his classic treatise *The Imitation of Christ*, “I am the way, the truth and the life.

Without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; without the life, there is no living. I am the way you must follow, the truth which you must believe and the life for which you must hope. I am the inviolable way, the infallible truth, the unending life. ”

“WITHOUT THE WAY, THERE IS NO GOING;  
WITHOUT THE TRUTH, THERE IS NO KNOWING;  
WITHOUT THE LIFE, THERE IS NO LIVING.”

THOMAS A KEMPIS

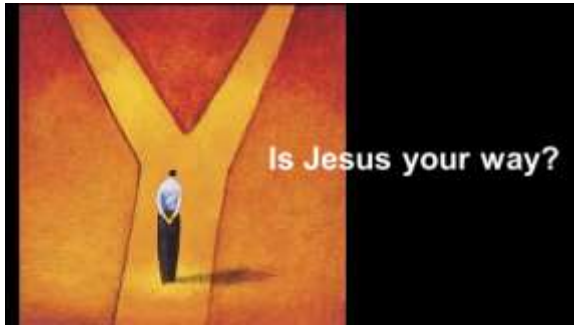
The Jesus way, as we are about to discover in John’s gospel is the way of the cross. It is the way of sacrifice and self-surrender.

“I am the way, the truth and the life” equates to Jesus’ invitation “follow me.” Jesus. At the end of John’s gospel, Jesus tells Peter, “Follow me.” (21.19). Follow the Jesus way. The Jesus way is not your way and its’ not my way. It is most assuredly not the American way. The

North American church is so conspicuous in its attempt to replace the Jesus way with the American way.

The first followers of Jesus were distinctive in their manner of following. They cared for the poor and visited prisoners. They displayed hospitality to strangers and welcomed the outcast. The primary moniker for identifying them was ‘the way.’ Six times in Acts they are identified as people of “the way” (9.2; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22). They were first called “the way” before they became known as Christians.

Let me bring this sermon down to where we live. This is the so-what-difference-this-sermon-can-make- in-my-life moment.



Is Jesus your way? Be honest. Are you living Jesus way or your way? How's that working for you to live your way? Maybe it is time for you to go Jesus' way.

Living the Jesus' way begins with a conscious choice to follow Jesus. That said, deciding to follow Jesus is not one-time salvation event. It extends over the course of your life.

We can't follow Jesus any old way we want. Our following must be consistent with Jesus' leading. It is so tempting to conflate our way with Jesus way. This is why we make such a big deal out of reading the Bible. We read the Bible so God can form Jesus way in us. We are devoting six months as a church community to reading John's gospel so we can learn more about the way of Jesus.

We need Christian friends to learn the Jesus way. We require spiritual friends who are adept at recognizing the Jesus way. There are plenty of people out there to tell you how to live other ways. We need people to show us how to live the Jesus way.

You can't do this alone, folks. The people who engage regularly with other Christians in a class or small group are much more likely to learn the Jesus way.

Let me give a word of testimony. I have watched over the years men who have invested significantly in Monday Night Men. The men, who regularly read the Word, pray and allow other men into their lives are much more likely to go the Jesus way. Some of the men I have come to know on Monday night are unrecognizable from the way I met them in terms of how they live their lives and order their priorities.

Let me be clear. The Jesus way is not only the way you act in church. The Jesus way encompasses everything. The way we talk, the way we use our influence, the way we treat one another, the way we raise children, love our spouse, do our job or conduct ourselves as students.



Following the Jesus way can be hard. It means letting go our need to be right and always having the last word. It means letting go of resentments and initiating a process that could lead to forgiveness. It means turning the other cheek and walking the second mile. We need Jesus to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Go the Jesus way. Without the way, there is no going. Without the truth, there is no knowing. Without the life, there is no living.