

Sermon 9<sup>th</sup> April 2017-04-05

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14: 6 (NRSV)

The Amplified Bible puts it even more strongly:

“ I am **the only** way to God and **the real** truth and **the real** Life; no one comes to the Father but through me.”

I was listening to a programme on Radio 4 in the car with Lynne the other day where a Buddhist, a scientist and a Christian Minister were asked to debate what was the meaning of truth in today's society. I thought this should be good and fully expected the minister to refer to what I am speaking on today. Sadly he didn't take the opportunity and agreed with the other two, pretty broadly, that in this “post truth” society, truth is what each individual wants it to be for them and anyone who asserts that they have the truth and in Jesus case the only real truth is arrogant, presumptive and trying to assert that they are superior to all others because they have that truth.

I can remember a long time ago now when I was in the Bank one of the young girls coming up to me just after she had had a bereavement and saying something to the effect of: “Paul you're a Christian aren't you? What do you believe happens when we die?” I was able to share with her that I had a sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life to be with God the Father in heaven through my faith and trust in Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour. I may even have shared this verse with her I can't honestly remember. Her reaction was to say that it must be wonderful to have such a strong conviction and faith in what the future held for me and that she wished that she could have it to. We then had a conversation about how she could and I advised her to go and see the local minister in her own church, who she knew slightly, to find out more. Unfortunately she left to move to a different part of the country shortly after so I don't know the final outcome.

So this direct statement of Jesus would certainly cause and does cause huge debate today even within the church let alone in the secular sphere and would have when He spoke it as well.

So let's look at the text. Lynne and I thank God for every time we go away to a place we don't know where it is, for our Sat. Nav. system . We have a rough idea, sometimes, whereabouts in the country it is although Lynne always insists on going up to London and down to Scotland! And prior to Sat Nav Lynne used to have to navigate for us. It was always a bonus if the map was the right way up, and I can honestly say that we had more disagreements and hair pulling moments during those times than at any other in our marriage. Sat Nav has changed all that because it knows where we are going, tells me how to get there, and Lynne can relax and enjoy the journey so we don't arrive frazzled and at each other's throats.

Jesus in this passage has just told his disciples that he is going away but they can't go with him yet. When they ask where, he tells them about heaven and the plans God has in place to welcome them when they eventually come. He also tells them that He (Jesus) will come again so that they can be with Him in heaven in rooms prepared by God.

Thomas, always looking for answers says, “ Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus replies:

“I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”

It is a summary of everything that he had been trying to teach them for the last three years. He had tried to teach them that what all people need most is God. However, because of our sin we are separated from God’s holy perfection. Jesus came and lived a sinless life and as a consequence would take the sin of the world upon himself as he died on the cross and make a way, THE WAY, from mankind to God, becoming in essence a bridge, across which is the only access to God.

Most people nowadays want and desire the second half of the statement; they want the eternal life in heaven that Jesus refers to and they want a life NOW that is full of meaning and purpose as they follow Jesus. BUT they don’t like the first part of what he said that night before His crucifixion... where He says, “ I am THE way and THE truth.” The problem is you can’t have one without the other. You can’t have truly abundant life and the promise of eternal life in heaven without accepting and embracing the truth that Jesus is the ONLY WAY to God.

So let’s have a look this morning at those two somewhat controversial statements hoping it will give us a better preparation for explaining them to family, neighbours and friends should they ask us.

Let’s look first at “I am THE WAY”

The Greek here is totally emphatic ( which is why when you look at different versions of the statement in different Bible translations they are all word for word the same, with some, like the amplified adding words for what they see as clarification, but none changing the words of the statement itself). So what Jesus literally said was: “ I..and no other... ALWAYS am the way the truth and the life.” In other words Jesus was saying, that there never was, nor will there ever be, any other way to have eternal life in heaven, with God other than through His Son’s sacrifice on the cross. A statement not easily accepted in today’s “post truth” society and Christians who embrace this conviction are often referred to as narrow minded, bigoted.. even snobby or pious by some Christians and non Christians alike.

In our world of religious pluralism and tolerance, where this exclusivity claim of Jesus is politically incorrect and considered a slap in the face of other belief systems. In this age of endless options people can’t see why there can’t be options in the spiritual arena and Christianity is just one of many options they can try. It is okay to think you are right but not okay to think others are wrong.

Christianity is the only religion that proclaims a Gospel of Grace, all other religions require you to do something to earn the favour of “god”. They are “do it yourself” propositions where we have to reach out to God in various ways hoping to earn His favour. Christianity teaches that in Jesus Christ, God reached out to us. We know that Scripture says that God’s gift of salvation through Jesus was GOD given, GOD driven, GOD empowered and GOD originated. Salvation does not come from man to God through our efforts. NO! It is from God to man.

Only Christianity is based on philosophy of grace and not works. It teaches that God reached down to us because we are incapable of reaching up to Him John 4:10 tells us: "It is not our love for God, it is God's love for us in sending His Son to be the Way to take away our sins." No other system, ideology or religion proclaims a free forgiveness and a new life to those who have done nothing to deserve it and in fact deserve judgement instead.

The Bible does teach that we should do good works but we do them as a demonstration of our having received God's forgiveness ; not as a badge of merit for having earned it.

Christianity alone offers assurance of salvation. In every other religion it is impossible to have any certainty that you have achieved eternal life. When do you know that you have done enough good works? You never know and you never can.

Christianity affirms that our salvation is a result, not of what we do, but of our faith in what Christ has done for us and that He is the only way to that salvation.

Let's have a look now at that second statement "I am the truth..."

What I believe Jesus was saying here is simply this; that everything He said was true ... His every thought and action was absolutely genuine and trustworthy.

One of the problems with living in a fallen world, polluted by sin, is that there is so much falsehood and deceit. It is very difficult to know what is real..what is true.. what to build your life on pretty much as the three guys in the radio discussion I told you about earlier where defining truth for them in this world was pretty much impossible.

Jesus came and said; build your life on Me and My teachings. Trust what I say to you for I , and I alone, am the truth! Jesus is saying here that we must not trust any other way than His, for his Way is the ONLY true way. To experience life, both now and in eternity we must follow his teachings.

Now people have a problem with this statement. You see we live in an age in which tolerance is a much esteemed word. We are told to be tolerant of everyone's perspective on truth, no matter how different they may be. Jesus tells us we need to be loving and respectful as we share our faith. 1

Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. BUT do this with gentleness and respect." Tolerance is therefore a good Biblical principle.

WE probably need to confess that not all Christians have shown that tolerance as they share the truth of the gospel. If we appear arrogant or unloving as we attempt to share our faith, they, quite rightly will become angry and defensive and most importantly unreceptive to what we are saying.

Mahatma Ghandi is quoted as saying, "I like their Christ but I don't like their Christians."

Nietzsche also said, "We Christians must stop treating people who don't believe as if they were the enemy. For they are not our enemies ; they are victims of the enemy."

We need to be respectful – tolerant of other faiths. People do have a right to believe what they wish; it is one reason why God gave us free will; but just because beliefs are equally tolerated or protected by our nation's laws does not mean they are equally true. Truth by definition is exclusive. If a true statement does not exclude , then no assertion of truth is being made.

Everyone is entitled to their opinion but opinions do not make truth. Jesus is the truth whether we accept it or not.

If there were many roads to God then I'd agree that Christians are being narrow minded or holier than thou by insisting our road is the best. BUT that is not what the Bible says; the Bible teaches that there is only ONE truth – not many. And the truth is we have all sinned and fallen short and if we are going to get to heaven , someone has to pay the penalty for our wrongdoings. Jesus by virtue of His sinlessness and Divinity is the only ONE qualified to do this .. to be our substitute. That is what He was as He hung on the cross as our substitute.

1 John 4: 10 says, He came to be the propitiation for our sins. This is true. This is factual and it is not narrow minded to act in accordance with the truth.

Some babies are born jaundiced and it can have devastating consequences if not treated immediately. I am told the cure is very simple and effective within hours. The babies are placed under a special light which somehow stimulates the functioning of the liver and all is well.

Hypothetically lets say a parent says to the physician that's too easy it must need more. I think it would be better if we scrubbed him in soap and water to restore his normal colour. The physician would respond, you don't understand, this is the ONLY way to cure you're son. You could still ignore him and insist that you believe in the truth you are suggesting as the best way. The doctor might respond by saying you are going to jeopardise his life I am telling you there's only one truth in all of this . .one way to cure him. It may sound too easy but look at the credentials on my office wall; I've studied at medical school; I've used what I learned to cure countless babies. Trust me on this. Would anyone accuse you of being narrow minded or intolerant if you looked at those credentials and decided to trust the doctor and pursue the course of treatment that would cure your son? Of course not! That is not being narrow minded. That is acting rationally in accordance with the evidence.

The fact is every human being on the planet has a terminal illness called sin. The reason that believers in Jesus cling to Him so tightly is because they have discovered that He is the great physician who has the only cure. We could try to scrub away our sins with good deeds.. but that wouldn't work. We could sincerely believe that there are other ways of dealing with our sins but we would be sincerely wrong. The truth is that only the Great Physician offers a treatment that will erase the stains of sin. Only He has the credentials and the credibility to back it up. So when we vturn to Him we're not being narrow minded . We are simply acting rationally in accordance with where the evidence points.

As Jesus truthfully said in the upper room that night He really is the ONLY way for us to experience real life now.. and have ETERNAL life with God when we die.

There's an old hymn that says:

I must go home by the way of the cross.. there's no other way but this. I shall never get sight of the gates of light if the way of the cross I miss. I must needs go on in the blood sprinkled way, the path that the Saviour trod, if I ever climb to the heights sublime, where the soul is at home with God. So I bid farewell to the way of the world, to walk in it never more; for my Lord says "Come" and I seek my home where He waits at the open door. The way of the cross leads home.. the way of the cross leads home.. it is sweet to know as I onward go, the way of the cross leads home.

We might understand that there is a God and even yearn to reach Him across an impossible distance. We might recognise His power and glory, His majesty and goodness, and desire with all our hearts to know Him and be with Him. But the distance is too great. The gulf is too wide. None of us can reach Him None of us can see Him or be near Him.. not on our own! The relationship that existed back in Eden was broken. The road was shattered. The exit ramp to god's presence was cut off and ended in empty space. There was no way until god in Jesus made one

Heb 10:20:

"a new and living way opened for us

Acts 4:12

Peter proclaims "Salvation is found in no one else.."

Why do so many people resist this fact today? Why do they struggle to embrace Jesus as the only way ,the only truth?

I think one reason is that we live in a very selfish world and to accept the claims of Jesus requires us to obey His command and die to self. Becoming a disciple of Jesus involves a commitment to let Him rule your life and live in and through you. Many people just aren't willing to do that. It is too much of a threat to their power and autonomy. They want to live their lives as they see fit, not according to the will of god. This is a tragic mistake, for as any Christian knows, when we give our lives to God to use, we always get back far more than we give. And where are you this morning. If you haven't already are you willing to die to self and follow Jesus? Are you ready to put your trust ONLY in Him who is the only way .. the only truth? If you are then right where you are talk to God; admit to him your sin and ask for his forgiveness. Believe that Jesus is His only Son and that He died for you on Calvary's cross. Commit to him your life to use as He sees fit and He will meet with you right now.

If you do that and want to share it please come to the front. If you do that and want to share it privately afterwards please see me at the end. It is important that you share it with someone to show God you mean business and to make yourself accountable.

AMEN