

SERMON – 7/5/23
'The Way, the Truth and the Life'

John 14:1-14

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me... Jesus said, Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:6,9)

Where are you going? I don't mean to ask you what your plans are for after the service – hopefully you will be staying for a bit and enjoying our church family picnic. No, I mean where are you going in life? What direction are you taking into the future, into eternity even? Where are you going?

I'd like you to think for a moment this morning about what it's like to set off on a journey. It doesn't really matter whether it's long or short or whether you are on foot or in a vehicle of some kind. Think about what it is you are doing as you set off. A thousand mile journey begins with a single step, the Chinese reputedly say, and there's a lot of truth in that, but even that first step has to be carefully taken because you need to set off in the right direction and so generally speaking you need to know where you are going before you start. When you are heading home from here later, it is worth choosing the right direction at the gate or it might take you longer than you think to get to where you are going.

Where are we going in these days as a church? These are uncertain and challenging times in Kinross and across the county, in the wider Presbytery and in the Church of Scotland as a whole and we need to be clear about our goals and about the direction we need to travel in order to achieve them. We need to pray for the General Assembly, for the Presbytery and for the Kirk Session that there will be clarity about where we need to be heading. Where are we going?

In the Christian calendar at the moment we are on the journey from Easter to Pentecost, remembering the days following the resurrection of Jesus, when the Lord appeared to His followers before the coming of the Holy Spirit. Next week is Christian Aid

Sunday, the week after is Ascension Sunday and the next again is Pentecost and our focus on each of these occasions will help to remind us of what God is asking of us. But today I'd like to pause with you to think about some famous words that Jesus uttered on the night He was betrayed as He sat with His disciples in the Upper Room and tried to prepare them for the journey ahead.

It must have been a particularly difficult time of Jesus. *He* knew what lay ahead of Him later that night and the following day. He knew that He must be betrayed into the hands of the authorities, that He must suffer and be put to death, but although the promise He had been given and that He had shared with His followers was that on the third day He would be raised again from the dead, there could be no real certainty of that – He was having to walk entirely by faith, entrusting Himself to His heavenly Father's care as He set off into the unknown. These could have been His last ever words to the people with whom He had shared close fellowship over the preceding three years, and you all know how hard it is to say goodbye. Yet in the midst of His own struggle and heart-ache, Jesus had to offer re-assurance to the disciples, to teach them something of what lay ahead and also to show *them* the way to go. How hard it must have been for Jesus to realise just how little His followers really understood of what He had come to do, how little they had really grasped of His identity.

Our Bible reading this morning centred around a number of questions the disciples asked. Thomas is no doubt speaking for others also when he says, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Philip will also have been voicing a longing that was in the hearts of others when he says, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." They are questions that hesitant people, ourselves among them, have asked throughout the intervening centuries. 'Lord, how can we know the way?' 'Lord, show us the Father.' And Jesus' responses to the disciples on the night before He died ring down the ages to us to this day and bear some reflection still as we seek to know the way, and to see God. As Christ set off on His journey that night towards Gethsemane, the Trial, the Cross and the grave, He could have had no certainty about the reliability of those to whom

He had entrusted His message. 'Follow me!' He had said to them. But even after all they had been through, Thomas could still say, "Lord, we don't know where you're going" and Philip could still not see God in Him.

Where were *they* going? And where are we going? Do we know the way? Are we still looking to be shown the Father? Reflect with me on what Jesus says because His words are beacons to us on our journey still. Jesus said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.' Jesus said, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'

It is too easy just to quote these familiar words without taking in their true significance. Think back to the journey that I asked you to imagine earlier. We've probably all found ourselves in a situation where we've needed to ask for directions. I like to know where I'm going before I set out – if I'm going somewhere I've never been before, I get the map out or I look for directions so that I have as clear an idea as I possibly can in my mind before I set out. I have a pretty good sense of direction and I can usually get to where I want to go without too much difficulty, although if you ask Christine she will tell you we've had our moments. What I'm not good at doing when I *do* get lost is to stop and ask for help – they tell me that most men are the same in that regard. But either way, whether you are asking for help before you set out or while you are on the way, what you expect to get is a route map or a set of directions following road numbers or recognisable landmarks, and I think that was the kind of answer that Thomas was expecting when he asked Jesus his question that night. 'We don't know where you are going so how can we know the way.' He was looking to Jesus for a road-map for the journey ahead and what he got was this astonishing statement '*I* am the way.' Think how you would react if you stopped someone to ask for directions and *they* replied, "I am the way." What would you think? How would you respond? You might think they meant 'I'll show you the way' or 'I'll take you there myself' but actually neither of these interpretations does justice to the phrase. Does 'I am the way' not mean 'I am the road itself,' or 'I am the means of getting you to where you're going'? And if that is the case with Jesus' words to Thomas and to us, do we not

need to look at where we're going as Christians and the way to get there in a very different way from the way we approach any other journey in life. What most of us are looking for in life is that a road-map – a blueprint or a recipe that we can simply take up and follow – whereas what Jesus is holding out to us is *Himself* – not a recipe but a relationship. The Christian way is therefore not even primarily about following in Jesus' footsteps, following Jesus' commands, finding our way forward in dependence on Him, it is first of all about *knowing* Him, relating to Him, living in Him, and discovering in the process that we find ourselves already at our destination.

Have you ever been on a journey when you get so engrossed talking to someone on the way that the time and the miles just pass in a flash – well, that's what it's like to be in Christ who Himself is the Way.

And similarly, when with Philip when we ask 'Show us the Father,' maybe we make it harder for ourselves than it should be; maybe we are tempted to lift our eyes beyond the horizons of this world when the answer is staring us rather more obviously in the face. Jesus says, 'No-one comes to the Father except through me.' That is not to make it harder to find God – quite the contrary – Jesus says, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.' Christ is astonished that Philip can have spent so much time with Him and not realised that he has already seen God. And maybe we too sometimes look in the wrong place for God, maybe we too expect Him to be so beyond us, so 'other' that we do not realise as we come to know more and more by faith of Immanuel, God with us, as we encounter Him in His Word and among His people, and as we experience the life of His Spirit that we are simultaneously getting to know the Father, the Eternal God of heaven and earth.

In a sense, once you have begun a journey you are already there. You get on the train or the aeroplane, and you're committed to going; you set off down a particular road or path and, apart from the time it takes you to get there, that's where you're going. Well, if that is partially true when it comes to making physical journeys, it is entirely true when it comes to the journey of faith. When you set off on the road with Jesus Christ your destination is

guaranteed. 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me. Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.' It is finished.

Jesus is the key here. He came to reveal God to us and He died and rose again and ascended to heaven to open the everlasting way for us

Where are you going? Are you going to the Father's house where there are many rooms and where a place is prepared for you? Or are you not so sure? Maybe, like many people before you, you want to know more of the Father here and now, that you might be prepared to meet Him face to face one day. Maybe, like many others, you wonder if you actually know where you're going and what the way to get there might be.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." It is Jesus we must seek. It is Jesus who will prove to be everything we could possibly need. So, where are you going? To take hold of Jesus, I trust. That's the very first step.