

EASTER 5 – YEAR A (2026)

These words, spoken by Jesus to prepare his disciples for his departure from them, are some of his most famous: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'. They are often read at funerals, and many have been the times when, as I have spoken them, I have heard people saying them with me. And the fact that this passage is a favourite for times of grief and loss, we can easily understand; because it reassures us of Jesus' promise of eternal life, and offers us hope when we can't see the way ahead, and the future is unknown. Even the hearts of the most cynical and irreligious can be moved by thoughts of the many mansions of the Father's house, and why wouldn't they be? It's a consoling thought: that, after the last analysis, and God finally brings to fruition the New Creation, begun in the Resurrection of his Son, there will be room enough for everyone in that eternal home.

But, there's another side to Jesus' well-known saying, and one that has caused, and continues to cause, trouble: because Jesus' claim that he is *the* way, the only way, is, to many minds, shocking and highly controversial. Indeed, since the Enlightenment of the long-eighteenth century, people have questioned and contested Jesus' claim to be the only way to God; and have pointed to the damage done by an aggressive and domineering Church, which has ridden roughshod over other cultures and religious traditions, as evidence against him. They contend that this hubris – whether of Jesus, or S. John or the Church – is

indefensible in our modern age of religious plurality and inter-faith dialogue; and even many Christians struggle to accept, or actively reject, the assertion that Jesus and Christianity are unique.

But the trouble is that, if they're not, then the house of cards collapses, and there's no point in Christianity at all: because, if you dethrone Jesus, then you end up enthroning something, or someone, else; and, although the idea that all religions are the same sounds inclusive and democratic, it just isn't true, as even a basic comparative study will conclude. For, if we say, as many do, that all of the great religious traditions and their principal proponents – Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, Buddha – provide *a way God*, then we directly contradict what the Christian Church has always believed and taught: that, in Jesus, God has acted decisively within human history to bring about his purposes for human salvation, which began in the life of the Chosen People of Israel, was fulfilled in the Incarnation, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and which truth is entrusted to his Body, the Church to proclaim until the end of time. And the contemporary idea that all religions are equal and bear some vague witness to the unknowable God is, and always has been, alien and anathema to Christianity. No: Jesus' words stand as revealed truth, however offensive or inconvenient they might be; and what matters, therefore, is how we act upon them.

Of course, it is true that many Christians and churches have been, and continue to be, arrogant in their presentation of the Gospel; and, in so doing, have done

disservice to their Lord – an aggressive and superior Christianity is demonstrably incompatible with the example of the Jesus who washed his disciples' feet, and tells us to do likewise; and of the same Lord, who commands his followers to show our love for God and for one another through humble and self-sacrificial service. And so, the only way to interpret Jesus' saying, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life', whilst being confident in making that claim, is in the broader context of today's Gospel passage, in which a radical and revolutionary vision of God is set before our eyes. Because, the Father, whom Jesus reveals, is the God who weeps, the God who serves, the God who, in his Son, suffers pain, fear, rejection and death as we do – the God who is with us in everything, and whose love will never let us go. No other religion proclaims this vision of God; and when we Christians do, it shouldn't be by use of power or subjugation, but by the evidence of transformed hearts and lives – the living proof that it is true.

All of us have loved ones and friends who have no faith, or who follow other religions, or who are not quite sure what they believe, and we must respect them; but that doesn't absolve us from fulfilling our vocation to witness to the truth of the Christian faith, as long as we engage in that witness with sensitivity, and within the terms of reference that Jesus lays out, whilst remembering always that it is not we who convert people, but the Holy Spirit of God.

But, as always, Jesus' teaching is challenging; and the Saviour, who is the Way, is also the Truth and the Life. And, in this Eastertide, as we seek to comprehend

and inhabit the new life that is made possible because of his Resurrection, Jesus also calls us to re-evaluate our own understanding, or misunderstanding, of the God whom he reveals; and invites us to see afresh his vision for humanity renewed in the image of divine love.

And what S. John's Gospel says – particularly to those who think that they've got it all neatly sussed-out and sorted – is: 'Don't come with a fixed idea of who God is, and then try to fit Jesus into it; because Truth incarnate will deny and defy all attempts to make him fit into your mould. Rather, look at Jesus, and you'll see God himself – the God who is uniquely and definitively revealed in his Son; the true God, with whom, because of Jesus, we are able to relate, and know forgiveness, reconciliation, peace and eternal life'. The Church is indeed open to, and welcomes, all, but on God's terms, and not ours; just as truth is not a variable human construct, but, rather, is immutable, and defined by God.

And our vocation, as those who know Jesus to be Way, the Truth and the Life, is to show the world that his claims are true, by imitating him in our interactions with others; and by extending to them, without exception, the generosity of spirit and unconditional love that he offers to us. There is room enough for everyone in our heavenly Father's house, though it is not given to us to know, or to decide, who might reside there. We will only know who our neighbours in heaven will be when we get there: meanwhile, our duty is to treat everyone as if we and they were there already. Amen.