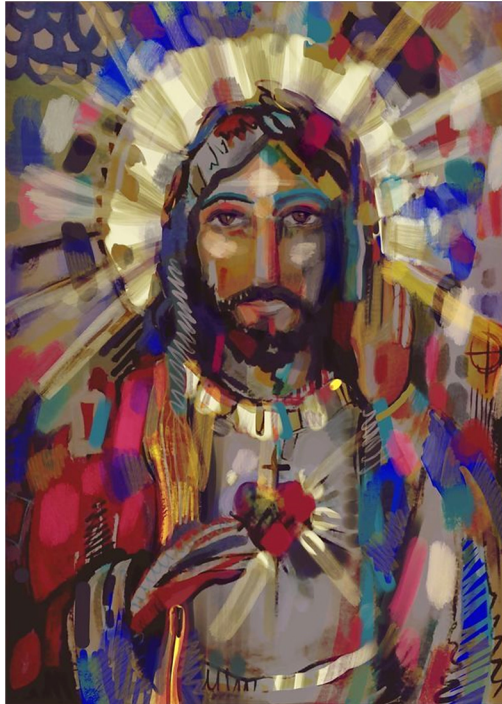


"I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"Christ the King"

Prayer of Illumination

God, the Scriptures remind us that *"your word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path."* As we hear our reading today, may Jesus, the Word made flesh, also be our guide and our light that illumines the true way to you, which gives us life.
Amen.

Background

I'd like to provide two pieces of background information before we hear today's Scripture reading.

First, one of the key teachings in John's gospel is this:

"The word became flesh."

In other words, God's word has come to the world and it didn't ultimately become:

- a stone tablet,
- a papyrus scroll, or
- a leather book.

God's word became human flesh and dwelt among us.

Second, our passage is part of Jesus' Farewell Discourse. Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure. And it's not a cause for despair or discouragement, even though it's certainly a difficult road. Jesus' way to the Father leads through the shame of crucifixion and the glory of resurrection. Jesus' way is our way—that of dying and rising. The cross and the resurrection. The death of our old self, the birth of our new self. The way we must go through is his way, his very self.

But the disciples still weren't getting it quite yet. And like them, we still have our struggles today.

So let's hear the Word of the Lord from...

Scripture: John 14:4-7 (NRSV)

⁴ "And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – "I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"

It was 1989 in Chicago and I was lost. Cell phones and GPS didn't exist. No google maps, just large, hard to fold paper maps. I hadn't had my driver's license all that long. I found myself in a gas station phone booth calling my parents collect. Please pick up. Dad, I have no idea where I am. Their plane had landed an hour ago. I hadn't made it to the airport yet to pick them up. How were they going to get home? I was late and lost. How did I get here?

It was all so easy. I was to pick up my neighbors from O'Hare airport. Things had been going well. I'd been watching their dog Buffy the whole week. No problems there. They gave me the keys to their 1986 Dodge Caravan. I would pick up the whole family from the airport. Mrs. Towle had been a teacher of mine at Roosevelt Junior High. Mr. Towle was a lawyer—would he sue me for this? Even their daughter Amy was there. Amy was in college. Amy was a lifeguard at the River Forest Tennis Club. This was my moment to shine. Just pick them up from the airport and bring them home safely. But there was a glitch: I went the wrong way on the expressway. Right road, wrong direction. And here I was, an hour after the flight landed utterly lost, embarrassed, and stressed out.

My dad, who knows Chicago like the back of his hand, was finally able to get me home. I never did make it to the airport. I think my poor neighbors got a taxi home—they were befuddled too. I had to make the drive of shame in their 1986 Dodge Caravan and apologize for the no show much later in the evening. My future with Amy was dashed.

Thanks to GPS, we don't get lost as much these days, but we feel lost in other ways:

- How are we going to find our way out of this pandemic?
- How do we sort truth from fiction and lies--with all the spin, slants, and half-truths flying around?
- What health care options should I choose?
- How do I handle this really difficult relationship?
- How do we bridge our political divides and mistrust?
- What do I do with my life?
- How can I get closer to God—my faith feels dry.

The disciple Thomas is feeling lost and bewildered, like me in that gas station phone booth. I love Thomas. Thomas is the Eeyore of the Fourth Gospel. Jesus is talking about suffering, his death, and departure. All seems hopeless—no light at the end of the tunnel. Thomas speaks out what everyone else is silently wondering about. Jesus, we don't know where you're going or what you're talking about. We don't even know how to know where you're going.

It's natural: we want clarity, ease, direction: Three points; Seven Habits; Ten Commandments; Twelve Steps help us get from Point A to Point B hassle-free. But Jesus gives a different answer to Thomas' question for clear direction: How can we know the way? Jesus doesn't give a "how-to" answer. Rather, he gives a "who-to" answer:

"I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

When we're feeling lost, Christ is our go-to person. Faith is about trust. It's about a person, not a point. We follow in the steps of the Messiah—all the way to the cross and resurrection. Trusting in the living God, we can call the Friday before Easter "Good."

Let not your heart be troubled. Trust in me, says Jesus. We don't have to know everything. It's about who you know. We can set our troubled hearts at rest. Fix your eyes, fix your ears, fix your heart, and your feet on Jesus. Learn from him. Study his every word and movement. Let him lead you. Stick with Christ through the chaos and the cross.

I AM THE WAY

The Hebrew Scriptures talk about the path and the way a lot:

- The prophet Isaiah says, *"Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, this is the way, walk in it."*
- David cries out in the Psalms, *"Teach me your way O Lord."*
- Jesus doesn't just give us verbal or written directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us where we need to go. "I am the Way."
- The book of Acts gives a synonym for Christians: "Followers of the Way."

What's the name of the street you walk along?

I like how one commentator put it:

- "You will be in the Way only if the Way is in you."

Get the Way inside you. Internalize him. Let the Way have his way in you. If the Way, Jesus, is inside you, you might be lost, you might be confused, disoriented, discombobulated, in the dark, even on the wrong path—but the Way will get you back to God. Sometimes you have to lose yourself to find yourself. Follow this Way and you'll be led not to a dead end, but to truth and life.

I'm not the way. Kris isn't the way. Billy isn't the way. Jesus says, "I AM the Way." Our task is to point to the Way—and get out of the way—to walk in the Way—together.

Sometimes we need to get out of our own way. We say to ourselves, "I got this." I don't need directions, I can get there on my own, thank you very much. The Sinatra Syndrome—"I did it my way." Other times WE can be a roadblock to others, to Christ. Or we get road rage on the way, and we get spiritually off course. Jesus gets us rerouted and back on track.

I AM THE TRUTH

There are days, when I'm a little short on sleep, and a little frustrated by the news and the world, where I throw up my hands and say with Pilate, "What is truth?" In those times, I remind myself to go back to the Word. "Teach me your way O Lord," says the psalmist, "that I may walk in your truth." My sense of hope starts perking up again.

Then John tells us "grace and truth came through the Messiah." And Jesus often repeats this phrase: "*Truly, truly*" I say unto you. And in another place: "*I came to bear witness to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice.*" And also, "*you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*" Jesus, speak your truth to me right now, and set me free!

This is the good news Immanuel: Jesus reveals and manifests the truth of God. That God is love. Love was made flesh. Truth that life doesn't have to be lived the way the world is doing it. There is a totally different way.

- We can worship in spirit and in truth.
- We can abide in the truth, be guided in the truth.
- We can be peacemakers.
- We don't have to be so suspicious, so US vs. THEM.
- We can be authentic even if we don't agree.
- We can be that new creation that we are in Christ Jesus.

Many people have told us the truth, but Jesus embodies the truth. Jesus is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He's trustworthy, not out to deceive us. The Spirit he gives is the Spirit of Truth. Go to him, to find out what's real, and good, and lasting.

I AM THE LIFE

Psalms 16:11 says, *"You show me the path of life."*

Jesus' I AM statements are full of life:

- I am the Bread of Life.
- I am the Resurrection and the Life.
- I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Jesus says, *"I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly."*

Because I live, says Jesus, you will live. He gives us living waters. Everything Midas touched turned to gold, Everything Jesus touches turns to LIFE. You want a real life? Jesus says, "I'm where it's at." Let my life, be your life, says Jesus. This is a confident statement—and he backs it up. Read about him in the gospels—he's always the life of the party.

Alike how Thomas à Kempis summarized it over 500 years ago in one of the bestselling devotional writings of all time, *The Imitation of Christ*:

*Without the Way there is no going,
without the Truth, there is no knowing,
and without Life, there is no living.
I am the Way you should follow,
the Truth you should believe,
and the Life you should hope for.*

To know the Son is to know the Father. But don't let Christ's beautiful, life-giving words become a club. Let not your heart be troubled about who is in and who is out, who is lost and who is found, who is right and who is wrong, "Just come to me, experience my life," says Jesus. See if my ways are truly life-giving ways.

Share and show the good news of Christ—lovingly, unashamedly. And to those who have not heard, will not hear, or have not embraced Christ-- entrust them to the God who loves the world And has the whole world in his hands.

In the sixth book of C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Silver Chair*, the characters Jill Pole and Eustice Scrubb entered into a magical world, not through a wardrobe, but through a door in a wall that appeared near their school's playground. After repeating the Lion's name, "Aslan" three times, they entered through the magic door and found themselves out of the school grounds, out of England, out of the world, to That Place. The air was fresh, birds with rainbow feathers darted about, and massive cedar trees surrounded them. But as they journeyed in this magical place, Jill and Eustice were separated by an accident. "It must be a dream, it must, it must," Jill repeated to herself. "I'll wake up any moment." "I do wish I never came to this dreadful place." Jill burst into tears. She cried and cried, and then cried some more. When her tears ran out, she sat up and knew she had to do something, because you can't cry forever. Then she realized she was terribly thirsty. Then faintly in the distance she heard a persistent sound—it was

running water. As she followed the sound, she saw a stream, bright as glass, running through the field. The sight of the water made her ten times thirstier than she already was. But then she froze—it was as if she turned to stone. And there was good reason: on the side of the stream lay... the Lion. He looked at Jill like he knew her, but then he looked away as if he didn't think much of her.

"If I run away," she thought, "he'll be after me in a moment. And if I go on to the stream, I'll run straight into his mouth." She couldn't take her eyes off the Lion—it seemed like she was there for hours. "If you're thirsty, you may drink." Jill looked all around, wondering who had spoken. "If you are thirsty, come and drink." Then she remembered that Eustice told her about talking animals in that other world. It was the Lion that was speaking.

The Lion's voice was deeper, wilder, stronger than any man's voice. It was almost heavy, golden sounding. She was scared, but she wasn't afraid. This was a different kind of fear she felt. "Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion. "I'm dying of thirst," said Jill. "Then drink," said the Lion. "May I, could I—would you mind going away while I do?" The Lion only answered with a look and a very low growl. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to do anything to me, if I come?" asked Jill. "I make no promise," said the Lion. She was so thirsty, she couldn't help but inch closer to the water.

"Do you eat girls?" she said. "I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. He wasn't bragging—just sharing the truth. "Well, I don't dare to drink." "Then you'll die of thirst," said the Lion. "Well, I suppose I'll just go to another stream then," said Jill. "There is no other stream," said the Lion. She believed the Lion. So Jill decided to do the hardest thing she ever had to do in her life: she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping the cold water in her hand. It was the most refreshing water she ever tasted and her thirst was gone.

"Come here," said the Lion, "I have a task for you to do." ... and the adventure begins.

Immanuel, come to the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Drink deep of the living waters. Let your adventure, our adventure, begin anew.

Amen.

Sermon Art: *"Christ the King"*

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