

## 5<sup>th</sup> May 2024 – John 14:1-14 (Isaiah 40:1-5) ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life’

A couple of years ago I read a brilliant book by Robert McFarlane called ‘The Old Ways’. McFarlane is a fantastic writer on the natural world, and The Old Ways is exactly what it sounds like – McFarlane spends time walking some of the most ancient paths in Britain, many of which pre-date even Roman times. Indeed, one of these ‘old ways’ is the Icknield Way, probably the oldest path of them all, which runs from Dorset to Norfolk. People have been walking this path for 5,000 years, and indeed Alise and I walked a tiny little bit of it on our trip to Ivinghoe Beacon last week.

If those are the Old Ways, those of us who live in Milton Keynes are very familiar with new ways, too. Our city is built on a grid system, and (for those of you who watch this service from elsewhere) all the vertical grid roads (or Vs) are Streets, and all the horizontal grid roads (or Hs) are Ways. Prize for anyone who can remember all of the ways? Well, from north to south, the H1 is Ridgeway, then Millers Way, Monks Way, Danstead Way, Portway, Childs Way, Chaffron Way, Standing Way, Groveway and finally the H10 Bletcham Way. The last five of these run (at least partly) through our parish. In other words, if you drive or get the bus in Milton Keynes you need to know not just the way, but the Way, capital W! You can’t avoid them.

And if that’s true in MK, it’s certainly true in life. Life is a journey, often a difficult and uncertain one, and most of us feel like Thomas probably more often than we care to admit: (v5) ‘Lord, we don’t know where [we] are going, so how can we know the way?’ Finding the way through life is a serious business, and head to any bookshop and you’ll find shelves and shelves of books trying to tell you: ‘this is the way’. Or to update the image, the same would be true of podcasts and vlogs as well. But it’s all the same underlying proclamation: *This* is the way.... No, this is the way... No, really, *this* is the way.

And into this melee of ideas and confusion, Jesus comes and speaks a simple but extraordinary word: ‘*I am* the way.’ (PAUSE) **The way is not a path, it’s a person. I am the way.**

Many years ago, I visited the catacombs in Rome. It’s an extraordinary place, and all the more poignant to think that thousands of Christians made their home in the maze of tunnels, to escape persecution. We had a lovely guide who showed us round, and although we had a rudimentary map, she admitted that if she left us the map would be useless. There were so many paths, it was a labyrinth – no, our only hope of getting out of the catacombs was not a map or a signpost, it was a person. Our guide was the way.

And what Jesus said to his disciples then remains just as true for us today, indeed for every person in every generation of humanity: want to know the key to life? Jesus is the way. This, of course, is controversial. It was then – it got Jesus killed. You only have to read most of the rest of John’s gospel to see the sort of opposition Jesus had. And it is now. There are so many voices, so many beliefs – for Jesus to say that only he leads people to the Father, the one true God, is not a verse we like to quote very much in today’s culture. But it’s not our opinion, it’s Jesus’.

**So, the million-dollar question is: how can we know that Jesus is right, that he really is the way? Let Jesus answer that one for us: (v9) ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.’** This is possibly the clearest statement of Jesus’ divinity that we have; what Jesus is saying is, ‘you want to know what God looks like? Well, you’re looking at him.’ You’ve seen me, you’ve seen God.

This is why it's so important that Jesus is not just a great human being – a teacher with unique insight into God. It's God himself on tour! God living among us for 30 years in human form. Everything else we admire about Jesus flows out of that: his teaching is unique because he is the divine Word made flesh – so he can also say he is the truth. His capacity to heal, even to restore life itself is unparalleled because he is the source of life itself – so he can say 'I am the life'. The miracles are certainly signs – Jesus calls them evidence of God's work in v11. But it's not just a human being with unusual power. It's evidence that God himself is here, in the flesh, walking and working among us. As Jesus says: (v10) 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me.'

One of the great questions human beings wrestle with is: what is God like? And Jesus' answer to the world is: if you want to know what God is like, look at me. The character of God is fully and uniquely revealed in Jesus. Other paths have some of the truth – let's be clear that we don't see revelation in binary terms, that somehow it's all or nothing. Followers of Jesus have common ground with all of the other major faiths and worldviews, there are things we can affirm and share together because God in his grace has given us all the capacity to seek him. But **the whole revelation, the full picture if you like, is only found in Jesus.**

If you like puzzles, you know how it feels when there's a piece missing, especially right in the middle of the picture. Doesn't matter how much of the picture you've done, it's not complete. Well, in religious terms, that's Jesus. Without the Jesus piece, the puzzle is never finished.

So, let's recover our confidence in this text. **When Jesus says he is the way, he is not excluding anyone – rather he invites the whole world to see it.** What you've been missing he says – it's me. I'm the way in to everything else. And the 'everything else' is not ultimately a set of rules and regulations, or compulsory practices, it's a person.

And the good news is that **this person is able to replicate his transforming life-giving power in anyone who follows his way:** (v12) 'Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing.' One of the great crimes of the church in certain generations is to misapply the truth of this text. Who can do Jesus' works? Only priests? Only missionaries? Only people with a theology degree? No, whoever believes in me. This transforming life is poured out into every heart that receives Jesus. The only thing that Jesus asks, the only boundary that he sets, is that he can put his name to it. So, he's not going to squish your enemy if you ask him to, because he tells you to bless them and pray for them. He's not going to give you a lottery win, because where your treasure is, there your heart is. But he loves to glorify the Father, so if the prayer you pray leads to an outcome that gives God glory, then he longs to answer it.

That doesn't solve every mystery of prayer, though I would urge us to reflect on whether what we pray gives *God* the glory, because that is Jesus' ultimate purpose, that's what he can put his name to. But, basically, Jesus tells us this to raise our faith. The disciples were anxious and Jesus wants to let them know that whatever is about to happen, he's not leaving them because henceforth he'll always be with them, abiding in their hearts by his Spirit. And that is our reality too. He lives in the heart of every follower of Jesus. And so he truly is our way, our truth and our life – because the person of Jesus is right *here*. I know that can sound corny, but it's the truth. Jesus is here, in our hearts. He shows us the way. He leads us into truth. He brings us his life. And, he longs to continue his work in the world, through us – praying and living in his name.

Friends, this is our reality. Let Jesus be your way, your truth, your life. For all who come to him he will never turn away. Amen.