

*The “I Am Sayings of Jesus**Pastor Randy Orndorff**“I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life” Knowing God’s Way**5th Sunday in Lent**March 25, 2018**Key Text: John 14:1-7***I. Introduction: A Grand Entrance for Holy Week**

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that first day of the week long ago, it was filled with fanfare, great expectation and excitement. Cloaks and Palm branches covered the streets and were being waved in the air. It was a celebration. The Jewish festival of Passover was about to take place. The streets of Jerusalem were packed with visitors and travelers from all across the region. It had a 4th of July feeling to it without the fireworks. It’s interesting that between his “royal” entrance, on a donkey of course, not a stallion. And after the Last Supper; And just before the Garden of Gethsemane experience, Jesus has this “Table Talk” time with his disciples. He knows what is about to take place and so he begins, “Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.”

II. Knowing “God’s Way in Scripture”

During our Lenten series on the “I Am” sayings of Jesus we’ve begun our sermons by asking questions related to these “I Am” sayings.

Are you hungry? Do you desire to live in the light of Jesus? Do you know the Good Shepherd and are you interested in entering through the gate and into a relationship with Jesus? Are you abiding in Christ, holding on to the vine and producing fruit all the while?

To understand the “I Am” sayings of Jesus is to understand God better, Jesus better and yourself better. John puts a high emphasis throughout his gospel on us being able to know God and to know about and understand the things of God.

I don’t know about you, but I often wish I knew more about God, God’s plans and God’s purposes than I do, but I am not so sure and clear about the ways of God all the time. I do know we all seek God’s ways. Moses in Exodus 33:13 says, “Now therefore I pray you, if I have found favor in your sight, let me know your ways that I may know you, so that I may find favor in your sight...” Moses was leading a rebellious bunch of people at this point and wanted God to help show him the way.

David says in Psalm 25:4 “Make me know your ways O, Lord and teach me your paths.” And then his son, Solomon says in Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is death.”

And when God is bringing the Jewish people out of exile and slavery, He says in Isaiah 30:21, “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the way: walk in it.” God wants His people to walk in and live in and worship in His ways. There is a way that leads to death and there is a way that leads to life. This way we have said is a journey. The way is a road, but the way also has a gate. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road leading to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

As a young person I was concerned about the road I was on in life. I wasn’t sure where I was going to end up. I could have very easily ended up on that wide road leading to destruction. Why God led me and poured his mercy, grace, kindness and forgiveness out on me as a young person I’ll never understand. I can only look back and say, “Thank you, Jesus!”

III. What's Your "Road" Look Like?

As I have sought to follow God, know God, to live for God and walk in God's way that leads to life, the road has been filled with speed bumps, potholes, water main breaks, curves and the like. Every once in a while a straight-a-way opens up and you can sail. Ok, be sure not to go faster than your angels can fly or so that you end up with a speeding ticket. Most of the time when I wanted to go faster, God slowed me down. And most often for my good and the good of others.

You know what I've discovered? Along life's way we come to understand scripture in a whole new way. When I grew up it was a big deal, at least it was to me, to have a blue denim jacket trimmed in brown, with patches sown on. My grandmother would sew my patches on and the one I was most proud of was the one that had a cross on it with 3 words. "One Way – Jesus!" That might be similar to the book bag clips you attach to your bags in school today like Ms. Betsy gave out at the beginning of school.

IV. Jesus Comforts His Disciples

In our text today Jesus is sharing with His disciples about his upcoming death and that he was soon going to go back to His Heavenly Father who sent him and he in turn is going to send the Holy Spirit so he in turn can send his disciple into the world to be his witnesses.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled." How many times has that been shared at a memorial service? Often. That's because Jesus gives a follow-up promise. "In my Father's house are many rooms, "the KJV version says "mansions," I go to prepare a place for you. I will go, but I will come again, that where I am you may be also." There is a lot of comfort in these words, knowing Jesus has prepared a place for all who say yes to him and are willing to enter through the gate that leads to life.

V. One Disciple Needs Clarification

And then good 'ole Thomas, you know doubting Thomas, the one who always gets a bad rap for asking questions has a question. Today he'd look at Jesus after Jesus says, "And you know the way I am going", and says, "Uh, Jesus can you clarify for us what way you are going?" "We'd like to keep following you but Lord, we don't know where you are going from here so how can we know the way?"

And that leads Jesus to this "I Am" statement that has actually become very controversial in our day. Jesus tells Thomas, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Now if Jesus had stopped right there, that would have been one thing.

The disciples and all of us can understand Jesus' way. His was a way, or a road of suffering, his life pointed to the truth of God's Word and his giving his life would be part of what would set us free. The truth sets us free. Jesus had told some Jewish believers earlier in John 8:31-32, "If you abide in me and my teaching – my way – you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." There is a connection between abiding in Jesus daily, knowing the truth and experiencing freedom.

VI. Is There Only One Way?

Then Jesus adds, "No one comes to the Father "except" through me." The KJV says "but by me." The Message version says, "no one gets to the Father apart from me." The main insight here is that for today, this verse is used by most evangelicals in our evangelism techniques in a way that seems exclusive to the culture in which we live. In fact, many pastors will end this "I Am" saying of Jesus when they get to "I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life." The second sentence simply gets dropped because of not wanting to make non-believers or people of other faiths feel bad or excluded.

Rob Fuquay in his book says Jesus' purpose here is not evangelism. His purpose is comfort. He just finished talking about him being the vine, we are the branches and us bearing fruit. Jesus still has "abiding" on his mind

and helping his disciples get through these difficult days ahead so that when he dies and rises again the disciples can move forward filled with the Holy Spirit. So that they can live in Jesus' way, to share the truth and offer life to all who believe in Jesus' name.

In fact, Jesus tells them "if you have faith in me, you will do even greater things than I've been doing." Jesus' life will continue to flourish through people like his disciples and you and me. Do you believe this? When Jesus says he is the way, he is not arguing religion. In fact, if you know Jesus you know Jesus wasn't even about starting a religion. Jesus was all about relationships! Jesus wasn't making a case for any particular denomination.

The key Jesus is trying to get across to Thomas and Phillip and the other disciples is this isn't all there is. He is telling them they have a connection to heaven and Jesus is there access to God. He **is** the way, the truth and the life that bridges that gap caused by our sin and rebellious spirits.

We can have that Jesus connection every day. Jesus' words here are not about creating doctrine. Paul does most of that in his letters. And be sure to get this. Jesus did not say "No one comes to God except by Christianity." Because right now Christianity is pushing more people away by our judgmental attitudes than anything else. I don't mind being called a fool for Christ. The apostle Paul was good with that. What I don't want is to be a Jesus-jerk. Jesus never said, "No one comes to me except through the church." The church should be a group of people who live in the way of Jesus. Jesus said, "I Am the way, the truth and the life." Jesus didn't say "only." We still believe Jesus is the Way and those in the early church were called "people of the way."

VII. Jesus, Our Pattern for Living, This is the Way

Jesus is our pattern for living. What we are invited to do on this Palm Sunday is to follow Jesus. It starts by us choosing to enter the gate of the shepherd. It continues as we learn to trust the Good Shepherd and to know he will feed his sheep and as we hear and heed his voice that we'll not wander too far right or left, but will hear "this way, walk in it." And as we walk we learn to abide in the vine more and more until the fruit we are producing is spiritual fruit and not only do we find ourselves living the Jesus way, but we are sharing our God-stories so others may choose to join us and live the Jesus way.

What does that mean for us on a daily basis? I mean it's great to march into town with Jesus on Palm Sunday, wave branches, sing lively and fun songs. But the week is just beginning and if you really want to live the Jesus way maybe you might like Thomas, ask a few clarifying questions like, "What way are you going Jesus? Do you really want me to follow you in your way? What will that mean for me in the week ahead?"

Foot washing? A Last Supper? A Betrayal? A Denial? Beating, Cursing, Crucifixion? Maybe this way of Jesus isn't so attractive as this Palm Sunday parade and worship service might indicate. Pastor Rob Fuquay shares 4 ways the early disciples made Jesus their way.

1. Small Groups

First, they stayed connected to Jesus in a small community. For 3 years they lived with Jesus in a small group. The disciples came to understand the Jesus way through a fellowship with others whom they entrusted their lives with. Who is in your small group that you've learned to trust and with whom you have real relationships?

2. Develop Spiritual Practices

Second, the disciples patterned their lives after Jesus by developing practices that deepened their relationship with God. They learned to pray. Habits like prayer, Bible reading, journaling, meditation, fasting, all help us grow deeper in our relationship with God. This coming May we as a church family will have the opportunity to participate in a 40 day prayer challenge called "Draw the Circle." It will be a great time to learn more and experience the Jesus way. Stay tuned.

3. Learn to Sacrifice

Third, if we will live the Jesus way, it will mean us learning to sacrifice. The way of Jesus would come by the Way of the Via Dolorosa later this week – the way of suffering. It would lead Jesus to the cross. The disciples would experience new life and hope that would come through sacrifice and that changed them. Will it change and transform each of us? Is there joy in sacrificing?

I've watched people give up their week of vacation to go serve on the mission field. I'm sure many of you have given sacrificially to support God's work locally and beyond. Some will give a Lenten/Easter offering above your tithe to help God's way move forward in Cuba, Honduras and in Ethiopia with our ministerial candidate, Susan Pullin. How many have a compassion child or something similar? How are you sacrificing right now? Jesus knew what was waiting for him that first Palm Sunday and yet he did not waver. He thought of you.

4. Show Compassion to All People

Fourth, the disciples saw Jesus show compassion to people, all people. Making Jesus their "way" meant releasing their prejudices. They reached out to many people others avoided. The key I think is that being around Jesus made them aware of how he noticed people others overlooked. Hey, we are back to, "Who is my neighbor?"

VIII. It All Comes Down to Grace

The Jesus way is about reaching out and responding to others with God's grace. John says this Jesus, who came from the Father is "full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Many of you have heard this before. When C.S. Lewis entered into a conversation on the backside one day about what was distinctive about the Christian faith compared to all the other religions, do you know his response? Lewis said, "Oh, that's easy, Its grace."

"No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus is the one filled with grace and truth.

"There is no other name given by which we must be saved." His name is Jesus. (Acts 4:12)

When it is all said and done, remember our salvation is up to God. Is it our job to abide, stay connected, to stay hungry, to grow deeper, to enter through the gate and live the Jesus way? No doubt that answer is yes! "We are to be working out our salvation." Says Paul.

Just know that accepting Jesus does not mean we become narrow minded, intolerant people. The truth is living the Jesus way, living in the truth that sets us free, living the life that is real life, should make us the exact opposite.

To live the Jesus way means we become God's incarnational presence for others. Are you ready for that? To be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus? Do you want to live the Jesus way? Let's don't allow ourselves to be part of the crowd at the parade. Jesus is clear, if we live in His way, greater things will still be done in His name. Will you choose the Jesus way and walk in it?

IX. Closing Prayer

Let us pray:

Living and loving Christ. Thank you for showing us the way. Help us to understand that just as you have sought us and found us, you are seeking all those around us too. Teach us to live and to speak about our faith in such a way that others who seek will be drawn into relationship with you too. In Jesus' name. Amen