

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
November 3 & 4, 2012
John Crosby
Jesus in His Own Words: I AM the Way, Truth & Life
John 14:6

Hey, would you take out the Bibles that are in front of you, please. Turn to John, chapter 14. It ought to be on about page 1,605. This is the last of the *I am* statements. For seven weeks we have talked about who God is in Jesus' own words, saying "I am the Bread of Life...., the Good Shepherd...., the Light of the World...." Each different side of who God is, calls for a different response from us. This is the last one we will touch on. Like several of the others, it comes at the very end of Jesus' life. He has just had the Last Supper. He is just going to be betrayed, and here He says the most controversial of the *I am*'s. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me." Along with problems of sexuality, probably the most challenging claim of Christianity is "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me."

It sounds so parochial in a cosmopolitan, multi-religious world. It sounds so judgmental, but it would not have sounded that way to Jesus' followers. They were Jews. They had spent a thousand years as a nation, coming to believe that there really is just one God. That one God had spoken to them repeatedly through word, through action, and through great signs. They believed there was just one God and just one way to God. They wouldn't have had problems with that. What the problem for them was Jesus' claim to *be* that one way. When we think of Jesus as a real person, as one of my friends said, "His claim is extra striking." Jesus ends His teachings, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me, so go and make disciples (that is, followers of Me) in all nations, teaching them to obey (not to know but to obey) everything that I have commanded you." That is a lot of authority. That is somebody who thinks he is really special.

Confucius never said that. The Buddha never said that. Socrates never said anything like that. Dear Abby never said anything like that. Even Oprah never said that. Jesus did. This part of Jesus' life is not about ego. He is famous for His different kind of leadership, for a life-giving, sacrificing, serving kind of humility. Jesus has just washed the feet of the disciples He is talking to, yet He knew that He brought the human race more than just knowledge. He brought them true goodness, how you receive being good, what sustains a human being through life and death and beyond. Jesus did not seem to care about anybody's opinion of Him. In that, He was not a very good pastor. We care so very much that you will like us, but Jesus didn't go home after the Sermon on the Mount and ask the disciples, "How do you think that went? Was there enough humor in it?" He says, "I am...." Listen to what He thinks. "I am...."

And if you don't mind, if the person before you has not done this, would you pull out a pen or a pencil and underline several things so that the next person who views them will have clearer idea of what "I am...." means.

We are starting in verse 1 of chapter 14. Underline this:

14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”

What that means is that their hearts *are* troubled. He knows that they are scared. They are having desperate trouble trusting Him because crowds are not all around Him anymore. He is not turning water into wine. No bread for the masses. These are tough times. They are having trouble trusting but He says, “Trust God.” Having trouble trusting? I say, “Welcome to the club. Me, too.”

Verse 2:

² My Father’s house has plenty of room; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

What that says to me is that there are lots of rooms in the house, lots of different rooms. This is a generous, big, wide, mysterious view of what God is going to do for other people that we don’t know about, but it is also a very specific place. God seems to want the house full and diverse, but it is a specific place, isn’t it? I mean, you can call Target Center the Metrodome if you want, but they are not the same place. Don’t try to play football in Target Center. You can call Washburn-McReavy a hospital, but don’t go there if you want to get better. It’s a funeral home. They are different places. Jesus says, “There is *this* place, My house.” He says,

Verse 3:

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back....

Circle that please. That is the great promise, and that is the difference. Jesus goes first, and comes back. We said last week that you need to understand that what makes Christianity different is not the teachings of Jesus. We are going to spend much of the winter talking about the top 12 things that Jesus ever taught about. That is important, but what makes this place different is not the teachings of Jesus. It is that He said, “I am going to die, and I’ll come back for you.” It all rises and falls on the resurrection. If He did not come back from the dead, don’t believe this stuff.

Verse 4-6:

⁴ “You know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus says, “I am....” I think, actually, mimicking the words of the Old Testament. Remember when Moses is talking to God and God is says, “Go rescue the slaves from Egypt.” Moses asks, “Who am I supposed to tell Pharaoh who sent me?” What makes You different, God? And God says, “Tell them that I am sent you. I am.” And Jesus is saying, “I am....” It is both about knowing where you are supposed to go and then going there. “No one comes....” It calls for belief. It calls for response. You are not just called to believe. You get that in verse 7.

Verse 7:

⁷ If you really know me....

So there is a difference between knowing about somebody and knowing somebody.

⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.

And then,

Verse 8-11:

⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." ⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Tell them that I am has sent you.

¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves."

Philip says, "Show us the Father and we will believe." Thomas says, "How do we know the way?" They are just like us. They don't know who they can trust. They don't know which way to go, and it is only three days till the election. They don't know which way to go and who to trust. They turn to Jesus and ask, "Where are You going? Why are You leaving us? How do we get there?"

Are you in a place where you don't know quite where to go next? This is a life that is filled with all kinds of decisions about which school and which relationship and which kid and which job and what time to retire and how to apologize for that stupid thing you said *again*. All kinds of choices, and we realize that every choice we make has consequences, doesn't it? Jesus says, "I am the way. Come toward the way."

I thought of an example of this, but I was afraid that it was a culturally dated reference. It's from a movie. It's only about 4 minutes long but it's from a movie that is 23 years old. The same year that I came here, this movie came out, so I wondered if this movie is too old. I asked an 18-year-old kid who is one of our custodians. I said, "Do you know this film?" And he goes, "Oh, man, that's a classic!" So the next time you wonder about which way do you go, remember this.

(Film clip from Indiana Jones shown.)

Sorry I checked out the DVD so you can't watch the rest of the movie. I showed this to the young woman in the video booth and asked, "Did you get the point?" She said, "Yes, I did. Harrison Ford is very handsome!" You've got to take it one step at a time. It's about the path we choose, and it reinforces the idea that there is a right way to go, but I've got to tell you, from my perspective it is never that clear cut. It is never that right now. It's maybe once in your life. Almost every day all day we have choices about which way to turn and when Jesus says, "I am the way...." He is talking about us coming to Him, but I don't think He is saying, "Think three

times about every step you take because if you make a wrong step, you are going to hell.” He is saying that there is a narrow way. Remember that. He said, “The road is broad and leads to destruction, but the path is narrow to the Kingdom.”

The early believers were not known as Christians. They were known as people of the Way. Jesus is saying, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” but He is saying, “I am *the way of life*, not just the *way to life* after you die.” There is a Jesus path, and it is not at all about knowledge and it is not at all about sincerity. You can sincerely make the wrong decision over and over and bad things happen, right? The people who took care of President George Washington were sincere in their belief that if they just bled him a little more, he would get better, and he died because they stole his blood. Sincerity does not show us the path. Jesus does.

So I guess I want to ask today not so much *are you on the way* because I think every one of us is on the way, but *what way?* What way are you on because we all end up somewhere? A couple of times the Book of Proverbs (chapters 16:25 and 14:12) says this,

²⁵ There is a way that seems right to a man,
but in the end it leads to death.

I’ve got to tell you there are many ways, many paths in our culture, that seem right to a man but lead to death. They are often in contrast, actually, to what you hear about here. What you hear about here sounds rigid and not cool, not current, and in not what you hear out there. I’m not going to talk about marriage and sex. Did you ever think you would be tired of talking about marriage and sex? Because Jesus talks much more about other things than He talks about that, and He says that there is a way that is different from the world. For instance, if people were to look at America, they would say part of what success means in our society is that you have enough. Not that you have to be as rich as somebody, but you should have enough and a little bit more. We like to think of ourselves as generous but that is because we have enough and a little more.

A far bigger challenge in our society is to find the narrow way of Jesus who said, “I am the way....” because on that way is contentment in the midst of economic upheaval whether you have a lot or a little. There is outrageous generosity, not just tipping into the offering plate, outrageous generosity in the midst of a struggle for security. If you want to hear about the narrow way, hear this. “Consider the lilies of the field....” When you look at the abundance of your life, consider the lilies of the field and ask, “Who is really rich?” Jesus tells a story of a rich man who builds barns and says, “You fool! You are dying tomorrow.” He turns to a young man He loves and says, “Give it all up and follow Me” to show the young man that he was really in love with money. Jesus says, “The way, the truth, and the life....” The way is to give away money richly in secret so that people don’t go, “Oh, what a philanthropist!” And to give that money even to your enemies. “The road is narrow, but I am the way, the truth, and *there* is life.”

It is also about life and death. We live in a death-defying culture, a youth-worshiping culture. Rich and Jody have done over 40 funerals this year, and at none of them did anybody stand up and say, “Oh, good!” We don’t know how to handle death in our culture and so Jesus answers that by saying, “I am going across the boundary of life to death, and I’m coming back for you. Take the same way that I do.” Believe this All-Saints weekend that the dead are not dead, that you will find them with Christ waiting for you.

Laura and I went on a sabbatical last year, and in one of our travels, we went to Switzerland. We went to this beautiful, little mountain village of Lauterbrunnen which sits right at the foot of a famous mountain, the Eiger. *(Slide shown.)* It is breathtaking. That is the north face. Starting in the 1850s, people successfully climbed the Eiger but usually from the west face. Not until the middle of this century did people actually climb the Eiger's north face. People try every year and only about one in three or one in four make it. People still die almost every year trying to climb this mountain. People are not very smart. About one in three make it to the top, but over 95 percent of that one in three have a guide. The key to success is to have a guide.

You may be lost right now. You may be in some kind of recovery mode. You may be stalled in your life or not sure what comes next. You may be excited and running forward full speed.

Maybe you need to recalibrate what is really important to you because you are filled with fear. May I just tell you that one of the reasons that God brought you here this morning was so that you would hear a voice from the Shepherd saying again, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. Come to Me. Come to Me."

This is All-Saints weekend. One of the other pictures at the top of the Eiger is of a group of mountaineers who have made it and are looking out over the incredible vista of these other mountains. *(Slide shown.)* That is my impression of what All Saints Day is about. They are at the top of the mountain, and they are waiting for us. They want to cheer us on. Jesus keeps going back down the mountain for the people who are lost, to pick up the ones who are tired, to yell out extra loud for those of you who have doubts or are turning the wrong way, and when we get to the top of the mountain, we will hear the voices of the people we love. On days like this, in places like this, we remember their faces and even though we cry, we will hear the voice of the Shepherd saying, "Bear with Me. They are alive."

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.

