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I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14:1-14

It's good to be back with you this morning. Last week I was in Fairbanks, Alaska welcoming First Presbyterian into the EPC. It was 13 degrees below zero when I walked out in my suit for church. Mommy! You will hear more about Fairbanks in the future. And thank you to Ellis for his great sermon!

But before I begin this morning's message, we have an important piece of family business. My first Sunday at Chapel Hill back in 1987, I sang a duet with a young woman who had been in this church since high school. It was the start of a long friendship and partnership. Over the years, she moved from soloist, to elder and, 18 years ago, to the position of Minister of Music and Worship. During that time, under her leadership, our worship department has presented an incredible array of musicals, plays and, week after week, inspiring Sunday services that pointed people to Jesus.

Easter Sunday will be her last on our staff. She is retiring to spend more time with her newly-retired husband and her two brand new grandsons and to sit in our pews for the first time in 18 years. So this morning, I want to invite my friend and a faithful servant of this church to come forward and receive a thank you from her congregation. Kathy Alvestad...come on up! [Brief interview]

This morning we come to the last of our "I Am" series. This is the most comprehensive of the "I Ams." It sums them all up. And it is the most offensive of them. It is probably the most counter-cultural thing Jesus ever taught. But I would argue that it is also one of the most comforting things Jesus ever said. See if you agree. Our text comes from John 14:6. You may turn to it, but I'd like for you to just listen.

Via, Veritas, Vita. Way, Truth, Life. It is the Latin motto of many universities around the world. And it is one of the boldest claims that Jesus ever made. Via. The way. The path. This is a theme spoken of by the prophets. Isaiah said, "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.'" Jeremiah said, "...ask where the good way is, and walk in it..." Remember the message of John the Baptist? "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" And Jesus said this: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by

it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

I want to share with you a piece of ancient technology. It is called a "map." Please repeat. In the olden days, when you wanted to find your way to someplace, you pulled out a map—be careful how you unfold it because if you don't pay attention, it may never go back together again—and you looked upon the map with your eyes... and you pointed with your finger, and you found where you were, where you wanted to go, and you followed the funny squiggly line. Map.

Today of course, you use these. Your magic box. Your cell phones. Your GPS. You tell it where you want to go, and it talks to you. And if you make a wrong turn, it scolds you: "Recalculating, recalculating." And no matter what wrong turn you make, it will find a way to get you where you are going. Until, of course, you read these words. "Signal lost. Searching!" The other day I was in an unfamiliar city on a busy highway... and suddenly, I lost my signal. I was driving blind. I did not know the way. It's frustrating on a highway. It is terrifying in life. Via. Jesus said, "I Am the Way."

Veritas. Truth. The human heart longs to know what is true. What is real. The Psalms cry out that longing. "Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God, my Savior ...your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth...may your love and truth always protect me...teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth."

Psalm after psalm, prophet after prophet, the cry for truth echoes out. It was Pilate's question to Jesus on trial: "What is truth?" If only Pilate had hidden among the crowds during Jesus' ministry. Or read John's gospel! In chapter 1, John declares that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth..." And for the rest of his book, "truth" rings like a bell. Do you know how many times Jesus says the words, "I tell you the truth?" in John's gospel alone? Guess. 30 times! Most famously, Jesus proclaimed: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." That is the motto of an institution in our country. Do you know which one? The CIA! But the truth of which Jesus spoke was not a piece of evidence to be investigated. Not an objective reality to be discovered. For Jesus, truth was a person. Himself. "I Am the Truth."

Via...Veritas...Vita. Life. The opening verses of the Bible speak of God's incredible gift of life. "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." John opens his gospel introducing Jesus with these words: "In Him was life and that life was the light of men." And that's just the start, as Ellis pointed out in his wonderful sermon last week: "For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life....I will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life... he who believes

has everlasting life...the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Whitworth professor Dale Bruner makes this interesting observation. The Eastern world is obsessed with "the way"...the "tao," they call it; The Western world is obsessed with "truth"...veritas. But the whole world, East, West, North, South, is obsessed with life!

Via, Veritas, Vita. But didn't Jesus already cover these in previous I Am statements? I Am the Gate. Isn't that Way? I am the Light. Isn't that Truth? I Am the Bread of Life. I am the Resurrection and the Life. I am the Good Shepherd. Isn't that Life? But here, in one gigantic combo-pack, he puts it all together: I Am the Way and I am the Truth and I Am the Life. "Trust me! Know me. Draw near to me. Not only can I answer your questions about direction and knowledge and purpose... I AM the answer to those questions."

Do you see that? He doesn't say, "I know the way, I can teach you the Truth, I can help you find life." He says, "I AM the Way, I AM the Truth, I AM the Life." Pretty audacious, isn't it? We don't mind hearing from a guru who can show us the way and teach us the truth and improve our lives. But that's not what Jesus says. He says he **is** all these things. A one-stop existential shop.

Our culture...our world...finds such claims disturbing. And there is one little word in this passage that is particularly audacious. What? **The!** Or as John Lennox would say, "**the!**" I am the Way, I am the Truth, I am the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me." Here is the most offensive claim in the Christian faith. It would not be so bothersome if Jesus had the good manners to say, "I Am A Way, A Truth, A Life." That would be fine. One good option among many. Many paths lead to the mountaintop. Jesus' is one of them. But there are others. Yes, that would be okay. Our world could buy that. But Jesus has the cheek to say "**The!**"... and that changes everything. The world chafes at the exclusive claims of Christ. And there are some here who might chafe, too. I've heard it. Many times. "Jesus is my way...but who am I to say what another person's way might be? Each person must discover his own way."

This is the pivot point...the hinge upon which evangelical Christian faith swings. There is no soft pedaling it. We lift up Jesus as the sole soul-savior of the world, not because we want to be elitist, but because Jesus declared it so. And then, within three days, his audacious and exclusive resurrection validated his audacious and exclusive claim. No one has ever done such a thing. If the empty tomb is real... then Jesus can say "I Am **the** Life"...in a way no guru ever could or dared.

So taken by itself, this statement is offensive to some. But when you take it in context, you realize it was intended by Jesus to be words of incredible comfort. So... could we actually look once more at the rest of the passage? John 14 begins

with these words: "Let not your hearts be troubled..." Obviously, the disciples were anxious...or Jesus would not have said, "Don't be troubled." So, why were their hearts troubled?

The Last Supper is over. Jesus is sharing his final teaching before he is arrested. And he has just made several disturbing revelations: One of their number is going to betray him. Peter going to deny him. And worst of all, he tells the disciples...these men who left everything to follow him...that he is about to leave. And they cannot go with him.

Let's see... one of your band is a traitor, another a coward, and the rabbi you've devoted your life to is about to leave you behind. Would your heart be troubled? How would you feel? Abandoned, right? "Wait a second, Jesus! We didn't choose you. You chose us! You called us! You challenged us to leave behind everything that mattered to us and follow you! You told us we would usher in God's Kingdom. You promised. And now...you abandon us? Where are you going? Why can't we go with you? What will we do without you! What will we say? How shall we live...? Jesus?"

Have you ever felt abandoned? I will never forget the loneliest moment in my life so far. My first Christmas in St. Andrews, Scotland. Every single person in my dorm had gone home for Christmas. And the girl I thought I was going to marry...who had come to Scotland to go to school with me...had just gotten on a plane and headed home. I sat in that room, on Christmas day, all by myself watching, "It's a Wonderful Life"...and thinking, "No...it's... not!"

I spoke with a man recently who told me that, as a child, he had horrible fantasies of his parents dying and leaving him alone. He says he remembers vividly, as a little boy, being terrified because he wouldn't know where to go, what to do, how to live. Of course, it was just a fantasy. But then in Mexico I spoke to a young man whose father has abandoned their family. I asked him how he was doing. And he just sat there....eyes welling with tears...unable to speak. And that said everything. What will he do? How will he learn how to live? Who will guide him into manhood? Abandoned!

Jesus was about to go to the cross. Only he could do this. And he knew that his death, though necessary, would devastate his friends. He could see it in their eyes; hear it in their voices. Like Thomas who said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" And so...to these lost, fearful, desperate souls who felt abandoned and did not have a clue where to go, what to believe or what their purpose would be in life... Jesus offered these words of comfort: "I Am the Way and I Am the Truth and I Am the Life." Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust me. Draw near to me. Believe in me. And I will do what no one else can do for you. Cling to me and I will be your way and truth and life.

There are three great questions that vex every human being: Where shall I go, what must I know and why do I exist? Jesus answers all three in this one majestic claim: Where shall I go? What is my path, my destiny? "I Am **the** Way. Follow me." What must I know? What is real and what is not? "I Am **the** Truth. Believe me." Why do I exist? How can I do more than survive day to day? "I Am **the** Life. Live in me."

Via, Veritas, Vita. Where does this huge claim of Jesus meet you today? For some, it might still be offensive. How can Jesus be the only way to the Father? What about all those others in the world? Well, you are going to have to decide whether Jesus is credible or not. Do his words ring true? Does his life ring true? Can he be trusted? And is it true or not that God raised Jesus from the dead? If it is...however troubling it might be...Jesus Christ has done what no human has ever done before. He can be trusted to finish what he has started. And his claims can be taken seriously.

By the way if you aren't sure about these things, our Christianity Explored class is the perfect, safe environment in which to discuss your questions without feeling pressured one way or another. Christianity Explored runs on Thursdays starting April 25.

And then there is this. The Bible is clear that Jesus is the only way to the Father. But there are many ways to Jesus...many ways we cannot even imagine. John is clear: God so loved the whole world...not just America. Not just the West. The whole world. If Jesus is the only way to the Father, we need to rest in the comfort of knowing that a loving God has his way of revealing his salvation to the whole world for whom Christ died. We western Christians are a part of God's means of evangelizing the world. But we do not exhaust God's means. Did you know that Chinese Christian church has launched a massive evangelistic initiative to the Muslim world? Because, coming from communist China, they have access to Arab nations that we in the west will never have!

And anyhow, this issue of "how can Jesus be the only way" is often just a dodge that allows the uncommitted person to avoid dealing with their own relationship with God. Many raise this issue of "fairness" so they can avoid bowing their knee before the Lord. Jesus once asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" Then came the follow up question, "Who do you say that I am?" In the end, there is little you can do about what most of the world knows or does with Jesus. But what is your excuse? You do know about Jesus. You **HAVE** heard His words of life. You are without excuse. If Jesus is The Way, The Truth, The Life...if no one comes to the father except through Him...then what will **you** do with Christ's claim upon your life?

But I want to end with the wonderful comfort of this passage, for that is what Jesus intended it to be. Not something to scare or exclude. Something to comfort

and encourage. To those who felt like they were being abandoned...like they were going to face life alone...Jesus offered these precious words: "Let not your hearts be troubled...believe in God...believe in me...and I will be for you the Way, Truth and Life...even when you feel most lost, most confused, most lifeless."

We are embarking on Holy Week, the most hope-filled week in the church calendar. It will culminate with the greatest announcement ever heard: He is risen! But the fact is, seated here this morning, are people whose hearts are troubled. A loved one has a newly discovered mass on his kidney. Another loved one had a stroke. Another loved one lost a job; another still can't find one. Another has given up hope that she can save her marriage. Another is frightened for the life of her baby. All of that...right here...real stories...in this room. Troubled hearts. Unsettled lives. Uncertainty, hopelessness, abandonment.

Abandonment? Never! To **you** this morning, Jesus offers these majestic words of hope: "I Am the Way, I Am the Truth, I Am the Life!"

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. The text starts with, "Let not your hearts be troubled." WHY were their hearts troubled? What was Jesus' alternative?
 2. Review the "I Am" statements that we have dealt with? How is this one a summary of all of them?
 3. Pastor Mark suggested that one word in this text is most offensive. What was it and why?
 4. Which of the three claims of Jesus is most important to you and why? Which is most difficult and why?