

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“I am the Way”

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May 7, 2023

Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6).

When I was a senior in High School, my family hosted an AFS student from Argentina. Within a few short weeks, Martin became like a brother. He’s been back a few times, and each time it took all of five minutes to pick up where we left off. He had been inviting me to come to Argentina, and so a few years ago, I flew down to Buenos Aires and then from there to his hometown, Bariloche, a beautiful little ski resort town nestled in the Andes mountains. He gave me a tour, and showed me where he worked and where he learned how to ski. He showed me the best place to buy chocolate, a local specialty. He showed me where his grandfather installed the slate roof on the city hall. He introduced me to his friends, and because they loved him, they immediately accepted me, and switched over to English as best they could to include me in the conversation. He took me to his brother’s home for one of the most memorable meals of my life, an asados, an Argentinian barbecue, with the whole extended family, and a lineup of wonderful Malbecs. He took me for excursions into the Andes. He accompanied me the whole time, did all the interpreting.

Near the end, we flew up to Buenos Aires again. It was very late, after midnight. We checked into a little self-serve hotel, and then went out to find some food. The only place open was a rundown little dive. We ordered food, but Martin did not like the looks of some of those coming in. When the food came, we paid for it immediately. We ate fast, and while still chewing, Martin said, “Let’s get the heck out of here”. He was protective.

Next day he arranged for a cab and talked a long time to the driver to make sure he took me to the right gate at the right terminal at the right airport.

Now, I could have taken this trip on my own. All I needed was my smart phone. Martin could have given me the addresses, and my phone would have directed me to these places. But it would not have been the same. I wouldn’t have been with my friend or met his wonderful wife and family and friends. I wouldn’t have lived with an Argentinian couple and learned how to make a couple of Argentinian dishes. I wouldn’t have heard all the stories and experienced the fullness of life in Argentina. Without a clue I would have driven past many interesting sites. Potentially, I wouldn’t have been safe, or made all the travel connections.

I thought of that trip when I read the words of Jesus in our text for today. Jesus says to His disciples, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6). What does it mean for Jesus to be the Way? I would like to suggest it is not so much a path or road. It’s more like having a trusted friend who goes with you on the journey and reveals the depth of meaning along the way. It’s not like having an itinerary with places to see and check off the list. Jesus is revealing to us that He is the way who gives meaning to all of life along the way. Jesus invites us to stay close to Him, because only through Him do we experience the fullness of life in His name.

Sometimes, people approach Christianity as a do-it-yourself journey. They know about our school and worship services. They occasionally come to worship here and may participate in some activities, but they do it on their own terms. They don’t really get to know or love anyone. They are not introduced to friends of friends, or family members. They don’t get their hands dirty in the work. They don’t hurt when others hurt or rejoice when others rejoice. They interact with others about as much as marbles in a bag.

They may read up on what Christians believe and may even try to put these beliefs into practice. But they do it without cultivating a relationship with Jesus. As a result, the teachings and practices of the faith seem shallow and disconnected. It rings hollow to what’s really happening in their lives. When Christianity becomes merely a list of activities or an assortment of teachings, we are missing out. We are not experiencing the person of Jesus, His love, His life, which gives everything meaning along the way.

Today Jesus calls us to come closer to Him. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” He does not tell us about the way. He is the Way. Only when we are with Him will the way have life-giving meaning and purpose.

This is part of the upper room discourse. Jesus has just washed His disciples’ feet and celebrated His last supper. He has identified His betrayer, and predicted Peter’s denial. He is about to be crucified, and He knows His disciples will struggle to follow.

His disciples are troubled in spirit (14:1). Strange things have been happening. Resistance to Jesus has been growing. Rumors have it the religious leaders are seeking to kill Jesus and not just Jesus but even Lazarus whom He raised from the dead (11:53, 57, and 12:10). In a couple hours, the dominos will start tumbling rapidly toward His death on a cross. The disciples are distraught and anxious.

So, before that happens, Jesus wants to reassure His disciples so they can continue to follow in the difficult days to come. He speaks words of comfort. Look at the wonderful kindness of our God who cares for us when we are afraid and anxious, even as He Himself is about to face death! If God so loved us then, He will certainly take care of us now.

At the heart of these words of comfort is this "I am" statement. Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

He's inviting us into close relationship with Him. That relationship guarantees life and love wherever the journey should lead. However, take away Jesus . . . and the Way, the Truth, and the Life are also gone. Without Jesus, there is no Way, no Truth, no Life.

Acts 4:12 says essentially the same, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Mark 16:16 says it too: "Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved, but whoever does not believe, shall be condemned." And one more from John 3:36, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." It all sounds so exclusive . . . and it is. Without Jesus, there is no Way to the Father in heaven. If you want, you can bemoan, bewail, and begrudge that He is the only Way. You can even deny and disown Him as the Way. Or, you can praise and thank Him that He is the Way, open to all, no matter your age or sex, where you live, what you've done. No matter your pigmentation or political affiliation. Jesus is the Way. The only way, but also accessible for all.

He does not promise that it will be easy. In fact, He warned: Broad and easy is the way that leads to destruction. Narrow and hard is the way that leads to life (Mt. 7:14). Jesus might be calling you to follow in a way of suffering, like when your best friend dies, or when the cancer center in Johnson Creek becomes your second home, or when your income does not quite meet the needs. Jesus might be bringing you to a place you'd rather not go, a place of testing, a place where, like Peter, you cave into the pressures.

Regardless of the notable good or bad stops along the way, what is most important is you are with Jesus. He is the way, which means this journey is ultimately a saving journey grounded in His love for you.

The way of Jesus is the way of forgiveness. "All we like sheep have gone astray, each one has turned to his own way, [not the Lord's way but our own way] so the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:6). He bore His Father's wrath so that no sin can ever separate you from His love. His way took Him through the grave and brought Him to life so that no threat of the devil, no force of evil, not even the cold rigor mortis of death can take you away from Him. With Him, you are never lost.

In the days before Google Maps, if you got lost, you'd go and look for a gas station. You'd ask for directions from the attendant, and he'd do his best to tell you a series of five or six turns, but it would soon become hopelessly complicated and confused. It happened to me at least once or twice (and probably to you too) when someone else in the store would say, "You know what? I know exactly where you're going. Why don't I take you there?" In that case, you cannot miss the way because he is the way.

This is what Jesus does for us. He does not just give advice or directions. He's not just the destination. He takes us by the hand and leads us in the Way. He strengthens us, protects us, guides us, sometimes even carries us. He does not tell us about the way; he is the Way. He doesn't say "I have the truth", like another prophet, but "I am the truth." Not, "I will lead you to life" like some eastern guru, but "I am the life" the source and sustenance of all life.

Jesus is the way. His Word is a lamp unto your feet and a light for the path. His Word lights up and reveals the dangers and traps along the Way. His Word also reveals the fullness of joy along the way. He will keep you close to Him as you follow until finally you experience the joy of everlasting life in Him.

Even when you are not sure where Jesus is going, you are heading in the right direction because you are on the Way. Jesus is right by your side. When walking with Jesus, you are always at the right place at the right time. With His promises to comfort you and His presence to guide you, you can face the uncertain future, for He is the Way. You are on the Way with Him. Whatever happens, He is there with you. In His death and resurrection, He has shown you the depth of His love. With His ascension into Heaven, He has shown you the breadth of His rule. While you may not know what is going to happen, you do know where you are – on the Way, in Him and with Him. Out of love Jesus came for you, died for you, rose for you, rules for you, and promises ultimately to return for you.

In baptism God put us on the way. In the life of faith, we are moving forward on the way. All we need to do, with God's strength, is continue on the way until Jesus brings us all the way home to the Father in heaven.

Jesus said, "I am the way." Thanks be to God. Amen