

March 30, 2014 I Am: You Are....the Way, the Truth, the Life

David Whyte, *The Opening of Eyes* from his book of poetry called *Songs for Coming Home* (1984).

That day I saw beneath dark clouds
 the passing light over the water
 and I heard the voice of the world speak out,
 I knew then, as I had before
 life is no passing memory of what has been
 nor the remaining pages in a great book
 It is the opening of eyes long closed.
 It is the vision of far off things
 seen for the silence they hold.
 It is the heart after years
 of secret conversing
 speaking out loud in the clear air.

It is Moses in the desert
 fallen to his knees before the lit bush.
 It is the man throwing away his shoes
 as if to enter heaven
 and finding himself astonished,
 opened at last,
 fallen in love with solid ground.

Let us pray: "Startle us, O God! Startle us with the wild improbability of what we say we believe. Startle us with the incredible beauty and goodness of the affirmations this place, and our being in it this morning, represent." Amen (John Buchanan)

Well, here we are on the fourth Sunday in our series on the "I Am" sayings of Jesus that we find in the gospel of St. John. I have come to think of these passages in two ways: they reveal *Christ* to us and they reveal *us* to Christ. In other words, what I hope for in this series is a connection or intersection between the "I Am" sayings **and** our lives. Oh, it wasn't so hard to do, when I talked about the first saying: "I am the bread of life"- we know the hungers that consume us -body, mind, heart- we didn't even really need Martin to remind us that "Everybody's got a Hungry Heart" though it helped to hear the song. We can sort of get it when Jesus says, "I am the light of the world"- especially if we come to church and feel lost or

least or broken in some way: good news! Our brokenness is how the light gets in **and** out! Then "I am the door" and my suggestion to you to treat any door, all doors, as being a Jesus-shaped space to pass through in a world wide open to God. Last week, it was "I am the good shepherd" who gathers, leads and rescues us because of the love God has for us. Like a protector, like a liberator, like a companion, like a friend?

So up till now, the "I Am" sayings have been understandable- **even** the one in the desert with Moses where God gives the sacred name: I Am Who I Am." We can make *some* sense of the scripture, but today it is a hard one, a passage which I read almost exclusively at funerals. Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples, though they don't know it yet, and Jesus says "I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

And Thomas said, "Huh?" "What now?" "I don't get it."

I always hope when I am in a group at a meeting that there is going to be a Thomas there, or a 'Thomasina': someone to ask the questions we are all thinking. "Where are the washrooms? What time is lunch? Is there a test? Is this going to be on the exam? What do you mean? I don't understand. Which way are you going, Lord? Will you leave us a trail of breadcrumbs?" So thank God for Thomas!

Because, the truth is, I am not really sure I know **what** Jesus means when he says, "I am the way, and the truth and the life." All I can share with you is what I *think* some part of it **might** mean and that is this: first, I understand it as one description, not three. Sort of like we describe the incarnate God, as being 'God-with-us'. Not God comma with comma us. But rather God hyphen with hyphen us. So Jesus is then "Way-Truth-Life." I know this is a bit on the mystical side of things, and maybe the mystery of God is important to you, or maybe it isn't, but there will come a day when you stand at the grave of your hopes or bury someone

you love or set aside your dreams of the future and you might just want to reach for the lifeline these words give.

I have found myself in several serious conversations this week- some weeks are like that, you know? And at one time or another in these chats, which have ranged from survivor guilt to dysfunctional family secrets to crippling disease, I have thought "Wow! We could really use Someone to show us the way out of grief, and how to live with terrible/fearful truth and how to step away from the cemetery into the life in all its fullness which Christ alone can give." And Jesus said, "I am the way-Truth-Life."

It all reminded me of a story I have known for 40 years. It is this story about someone who lived a thousand years ago. It is both an old story and a new story: we all know it. It tells of tragic love and the resulting calamities that separate the lovers and cause them to doubt God - well at least the man whose name was Peter doubted God, which was kind of tough for him since he was a theologian, someone who was supposed to know about God and God's ways. While he walking one day in the forest with a companion, they hear a terrible cry. At first they think it is a child in agony, but then they discover that this terrible cry comes from a rabbit caught in a cruel trap. "Peter gathered up the little creature in his hands. It lay for a moment breathing quickly, then in some blind recognition of the kindness that had met it at the last, the small head thrust and nestled against his arm, and it died. Peter looked down at the little draggled body. 'My friend,' he said, 'do you think there is a God at all? Whatever has come to me, I earned it. But what did this one do?'

His friend nodded. 'I know,' he said. 'Only - I think God is in it too.'

Peter looked up sharply. He said 'In it? Do you mean that it makes God suffer, the way it does us?'

Again his friend nodded.

Peter asked, "Do you mean like what happened once at the cross at Calvary?'

But his friend shook his head. 'That was only a piece of it – the piece that we saw – in time. Like that.' He pointed to a fallen tree beside them sawn through the middle. 'That dark ring there, it goes up and down the whole length of the tree. But you only see it where it is cut across. That is what Christ's life was; the bit of God that we saw.' (Helen Waddell, Peter Abelard)

I know it is an odd story to remember but, I do. And when I lose my way, and the truth eludes me, and I am lost in the dark wood that Dante describes so well, "no way before me clear" then sometimes I can remember that 'Christ's life was the bit of God that we saw', with that wonderful image of the fallen tree trunk. And that small part I **can** see is enough. And I have a way forward and a truth to align myself to and a life to embrace. I know that I do not travel alone. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the way-truth-life."

Next week, Jesus said, "I am the true vine."

Let us pray: You invite us into many places, God. You invite us into relationships, You invite us into conversation, You invite us into action. When the invitation is difficult to accept, give us strength, and wonder, and hope. When the invitation is to an easy way - help us to accept and walk on! In Christ's name we ask it, Amen.

VU# 628 Come, My Way, My Truth, My Life