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John 14:1-14

*It’s about a relationship*

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New Revised Standard Version

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.  In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not 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. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

 There are times in our lives when we think we have everything figured out. For some folks, that might be when they are graduating high school and about to leave home and go to college.

 There are people who think that being a Christian is all about believing certain things: that Jesus is the Son of God, Mary was a virgin, or that all other religions are wrong.

 There are people who think being a Christian is all about doing certain things: going to church, getting baptized, not drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes, reading the Bible, doing a good deed each day.

 Or that to be a Christian you just have to be really nice.

Christianity is not about believing certain things, or doing certain things, or being really nice. It is by living, participating in, and being caught up by the way of life that Jesus embodied. That was his way. Frederick Buechner says we can be on Christ’s way and with his mark upon us without ever having heard of Christ, and for that reason be on our way to God though maybe we don’t even believe in God.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Faith is not knowing about God, faith is knowing God. Truth is a person, and that person, Jesus, does not always show up in the ways we expect, in our lives or in the lives of other people.[[2]](#footnote-2) When Jesus describes judgment in Matthew 25, he does not give us the image of himself, arms folded, in front of some gates declaring, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.” When Jesus describes judgment, he says, “I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” We think we have it all figured out, but Jesus might be right under our nose and we miss it.

 Jesus’ words in John 14 have often been used for exclusion. Faith seems easier when it is just about you and Jesus, it is all about what you believe about Jesus. But Christianity is all about loving God and loving our neighbor. It is an outward focused faith, always pushing us to look around and find more people to love.

 The disciples ask two questions that Jesus feels like they should already know the answer to: How can we know the way to God? How are we to see the Father? Sometimes we are like the disciples, we have grown up learning about Jesus and we should know the answer to these questions, but we do not. Life throws us a curveball, and we are out of our depth and we wonder, how can we know the way to God? How are we to see God?[[3]](#footnote-3)

Jesus' response is, “I am the way.” There are 7 “I am” sayings in John’s Gospel, written at a time when there was much opposition to Jesus and to this new Christian faith. In the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs uses imagery for wisdom: a path or way, light, precious treasure, a fountain of life, and food for the journey.[[4]](#footnote-4) And in the Gospel of John, the writer says of Jesus, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35); “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12); “I am the gate for the sheep” (John 10:7); “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11); “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25); “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6); and “I am the true vine” (John 15:1).

At different times in our lives, we will wonder if we are on the right track. We will wonder how we can know God in our lives. There will come a time for all of us when we realize that we do not have it all figured out. Jesus says “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.’” The Greek word for way that Jesus uses is hodos and it means path or road or journey.[[5]](#footnote-5) Stay close to Jesus, have a relationship with Jesus, because it is a journey, it is a way of being and becoming. Frederick Buechner says, “A Christian is one who is on the way, though not necessarily very far along it, and who has at least some dim and half-baked idea of whom to thank.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Christianity is not about clobbering people over the heads with scripture verses that have been taken out of context and as isolated verses. “Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.  No one comes to the Father except through him.” BAM!” Discussion over. Case closed.[[7]](#footnote-7) That’s a clobber text and that is not helpful for anyone. But did you notice something that was missing from the words that I just shared? In John 14:6 there are two more words, “to him.” The verse does not say, “Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life.” It says, “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” Jesus is answering Thomas’ question, “How can we know the way?” Thomas’ question is not “Jesus, are all non-Christians going to hell?”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Jesus is talking to Thomas. Jesus was comforting Thomas. Jesus knows that his death is going to happen soon and part of what Jesus was doing was offering comfort to Thomas: “Don’t worry, Thomas.  You know me. When I’m gone, just continue to ‘do the works that I do.’ Follow the path I have set forth with my life, and you’ll be following the way.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Then Jesus says something really radical to Thomas and Phillip, “the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these” (John 14:12). How can we do greater works than Jesus? It is similar to the way a broom works. If you have just one strand of straw to sweep your room, you aren’t going to get very much accomplished. But if you take a whole bunch of strands of straw and tie them together, then you’ve got a very effective tool for cleaning your floors.

The church is the body of Christ that continues to be in the world, continues to speak the words Jesus spoke to all the generations, and continues to do the works that Jesus did while he was on this earth. Giving food to the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, giving clothes to the naked, taking care of the sick, visiting those who are in prison.

Helping at Emanuel Community Center’s food pantry on Tuesday morning, proclaiming for all the world that God in Christ wants no child to go hungry. Mentoring a struggling young person, and showing the world that the Lord we serve loves and cares for every one of God’s sheep. Organizing a small group here at Greenland Hills like the two offered in June by Gary Fox and David Elliott to study and share and comfort and pray for one another in Christ’s name. Attending a meeting about a social justice issue, or creating a program that services the least of these in our society, and showing the community that our Lord is very concerned about justice. Befriending a lonely coworker, and making the statement that God is love. Writing a check to bring relief to a place in the world that has been devastated by natural or human made disaster, and proclaiming that our God is the Lord of life, not death. In all of these ways, the body of Christ reveals the power and character of God. The body of Christ does the works of Christ, and they continue his ministry in the world.[[10]](#footnote-10)

1. <http://www.frederickbuechner.com/content/what-it-means-be-christian-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/lectionary-god-under-nose-john-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/I-Am-the-Way-Alyce-McKenzie-05-16-2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/I-Am-the-Way-Alyce-McKenzie-05-16-2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.patheos.com//Progressive-Christian/Place-Prepared-Gayle-Landis-05-12-2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.frederickbuechner.com/content/what-it-means-be-christian-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2011/05/13/lectionary-commentary-“a-progressive-christian-reading-of-john-146”-for-sunday-may-22-2011/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2011/05/13/lectionary-commentary-“a-progressive-christian-reading-of-john-146”-for-sunday-may-22-2011/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2011/05/13/lectionary-commentary-“a-progressive-christian-reading-of-john-146”-for-sunday-may-22-2011/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. http://www.gbod.org/lead-your-church/lectionary-planning-helps/fifth-sunday-of-easter [↑](#footnote-ref-10)