

**Sermon for 5th Sunday of Lent 2019 - final sermon of Baptism series - "The Way , the Truth and the Life " at St Peter's at 8am and 10am. Readings : Job 24 v8 -14 and John 14 v1-7.**

**Sentence:** Jesus came up and spoke to his disciples. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes to the end of time.' AMEN

Over the past three weeks, we've been working through a series of sermons about Baptism – today, our subject is 'The way, the truth and the life' and I want to share some thoughts about each of those words.

In today's reading from the Gospel of John we learn that there is ample space in heaven for all who come to Jesus as Saviour. We are assured that to know Jesus is to know God. PAUSE On what is our Christian faith based? Faith, like love, evidences itself in obedience. Faith approaches God boldly to receive from Him.

John explains that we are to know Jesus in spirit and in truth. It is vital that our faith be more than just head knowledge - but we must be sure that our hearts and lives are affected by that truth. Faith is not static but dynamic. Like most things about me...My faith today is totally different to what it was when I was 15.

In this passage we learn that Jesus scolds the disciples: he assumes knowledge his disciples don't have, telling Thomas - "you know the way to the place I am going" [John 14 v4.] Then when Thomas objects, "Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus then takes him to task with the - "I am the Way" monologue. Perhaps Jesus was keen to share knowledge with the disciples as he knew the end was near - that he had not remembered what they already knew or didn't know. This happens in the final week of Jesus' life. PAUSE.

It was not that Jesus was an ineffective teacher - I can relate to that fact. It's more that we humans are just slow to catch on. Chapters 14 - 17 in John's gospel are known as 'The Farewell discourse.' He is leaving and they need to know the Way. Time has grown short. The hour is near. There is no time for subtlety. Jesus is attempting to teach a high level discipleship course with "students" - Simon Peter, Thomas and Philip who have been with him for three years. PAUSE

Simon Peter, Thomas and Philip **all make comments** and ask questions at this stage: chapter 13 v36 of John through to chapter 14 v8. PAUSE.... From the 9th verse of Chapter 14 all the way through to chapter 16 v29 Jesus does all the talking. The disciples fall silent: why? Because from the end of chapter 13 through to chapter 14 v8 they ask two questions they should already know the answer to:

1. How can we know the way to God? 2. How are we to see the Father?

The disciples' questions are meant in John's narrative to represent **our questions** . Even now, we still ask the basic questions: we still ask – 'How can we know the way to God?' and 'How are we to see God?' Jesus' response is: "I am the way" Jesus used this vivid saying to express who he is and who we are to become in relation to him. It is one of the seven "I am" sayings in John's gospel. Jesus is saying to his disciples, then and now - "Come on. You know this. In me you see God. In me you meet and will meet God."

That has dealt with the first important word = The Way.

Now the second word we are considering is 'Truth' - not quite so easy to grasp. How did the first disciples come to believe that what Jesus was telling them was the Truth and that they could believe it? It could be because time and time again they witnessed Jesus carrying out miracles - many times they saw him healing a whole variety of people. Jesus had the power never witnessed before - who he said that he was... must be true. The incident of fishing on Lake Galilee - they dragged up empty nets after being out for quite some time; Jesus told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat - so they did and found them overflowing with fish. Jesus was filled with power; they could trust Him and what he told them actually happened - he came with the Truth. In our society today it's becoming more and more difficult to trust what we hear or read - we have heard much of "Fake News" - news which turns out to be totally untrue. In the Church we must recognise three authorities:

- there is the authority of 'devotion' - of the experience of God, which is shared by the whole people of God. We all have authority because of our encounter with the Lord in prayer. We have all received the Spirit, who animates our hearts and our minds.
- There is also the authority of truth, cultivated by reason. Our FAITH cannot be contrary to reason, and so the Church needs people who wrestle with difficult issues, pose hard questions, and doggedly go on thinking. Each authority must have respect for each of the three. Each can go wrong if it excludes or undermines the other. In the history of the church they are always mutually corrective. PAUSE .
- Finally there is also the authority of government. Note that this is especially invested in the hierarchy of the Church, but we all share in the responsibility for the Church's life. Laity and priest working together.
- And finally we come to the third word 'Life' - Jesus is the life - not an add-on. He was sent to earth to show us how to *live* life and to be good Christians. Jesus called people to follow Him - To Be with Him - as they journeyed *through* life. He is the way for us to know Father God today and to become part of God's family.

Usually near the start of life, Baptism makes a person a member of a Christian congregation which is part of the worldwide Church. We express a desire to follow Christ. A new life has begun which is directed and empowered by the Spirit. Then we are commissioned to live out the baptised life and to take part in the prayers of the church and in the action of the Eucharist - or Holy Communion. At the end of the service the Baptismal party are given a lighted candle to show they have a mission to take Christ's light out into the world. PAUSE This has been lit from the Easter candle which is a symbol of Christ's resurrection and the victory over evil and death. Each of us who have been baptised is told: "Shine as a light in the world to the Glory of God the Father". I like the idea of being light in our dark world. Baptism is a once- and-for-all sacrament - it cannot be redone or undone. This last sentence gives us much to think about and to ponder.

#### **In conclusion:**

A relationship with God is what we have been created for. Jesus is the way to having that relationship. Jesus is the truth and so we can trust what he says. Jesus is the life and so following Him each day will bring us life to the full now - and then on into all eternity. It's a relationship that you need to build. AMEN

#### **Recommended reading:**

1. **Take the Plunge by Timothy Radcliffe**
2. **Faith Confirmed - preparing for confirmation by Peter Jackson and Chris Wright.**
3. **Mere Christianity by C S Lewis.**

#### **Questions :**

1. Why did Jesus say "Let not your heart be troubled " ? What was bothering the disciples ?
2. List 3 things Jesus told his disciples so as to calm their troubled hearts.
3. What was Thomas ' fear ?
4. In verse 6, Jesus says " I am the Way the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father , but by me."

What does this statement say for the major religions of the world such as Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Animism and Hinduism that do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world ?