

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

August 05, 2018

I Am The Way – The Way The Truth And The Life

Dr. Dick Foth

This part right here is not even in my notes. That's just a warning to the people upstairs. On Monday through Wednesday this week, Ruth and I were in Estes Park, Colorado; about an hour from our house had a thing called Grand Camp. It's for grandparents to bring grandchildren between the ages of eight and 12, so there were about 40 grandparents, 36 kids, and one of my responsibilities in that time, there were a couple of couples. One of my responsibilities was to tell a story to the kids and so I chose the Bible story of the kid with the lunch. You remember the boy, but the lunch with the five loaves and the two fish and all of that, and Jesus multiplies it and feeds five - 10,000, they don't know exactly how many, but at least 5,000. And you know, it's just this unbelievable deal. And at the end of the story, they were very attentive. I just said, 'Do any of you have any questions?' Because I had told him, you know, it kept breaking and breaking and breaking and they picked up 12 basketfuls, you know, when they were done. And so hands went up all over the place. And the first question, I love this question, this kid, about 10 years old said, well, did the kid get the leftovers? Can't you see him walking home with all of his buddies at 12 of age, got a basket, "Ma, you're not going to believe this." Anyway, I just wanted to throw that in.

When I was eight years old, 1950, summertime, southern California, Pomona County Fair and I just wanted to see the pigs. I'd been with my mom and my older sister and we'd been looking at vegetables and projects and quilts and stuff. And I had just gotten an Eskimo pie ice cream bar. So you know, everything was cool except I was bored to tears looking at vegetables and all that. But I heard pigs over there and so over on the far side of the area, this barn like structure I just sorta headed toward the pigs, I just wandered that way. It seemed like a good way to go, seemed like the right direction.

This is the first of a three part series on the scripture verse about Jesus saying, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Every now and again in human history, someone makes a statement, speaks a truth that changes the playing field. John, in his Gospel records one of those statements. If you know you're leaving, if you know it's coming to the end, you're dying; you're going to say the good stuff. You're going to gather people and say sort of the kernel of what's going on. You're going to do the important, gonna set things right, going to give direction, you're going to reaffirm connections. And John's Gospel is fascinating because here is John and he's the one of the four gospel writers that has an agenda in this sense; he wants us to believe 98 action verbs believe in the Gospel of John. They are all action verbs. Twenty one chapters, and what's fascinating about the Gospel of John is that almost half of those; nine of them focus on one week of Jesus' earthly life. Out of 33 years, almost half of the Gospel of John focuses on one week, nine chapters. And seven of those nine chapters focus on one day. So 33 years, half of it for one week and a third of the whole gospel of John is on one day. Because Jesus in essence in that one day is saying, in conclusion, I'm about to leave to go back to the father in conclusion. This scene is the Passover dinner and conversation, Judas has just left to sell Jesus, betray him for 30 pieces of silver. So Jesus is left with the 11 and he begins his, what I will call it's time for me to return to my father,

talk. Three apprentices, three disciples engage him in this part of the conversation. They're in play, if you will, Peter, Thomas and Philip.

Here's what it sounds like, John, 13: 33.

³³ *“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.*

³⁴ *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*

³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

It doesn't say love the world it says love each other.

³⁶ *Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where, where are you going?”*

Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

³⁷ *Peter said, “Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”*

Sort of upping the antics, sort of Beowulf epic boast or something, he ups the ante. It's like a kid who was the last time he went to the grocery store, knocked over a whole rack of ketchup, you know, and his mom said, you're staying home this time. He says, well, why can't I? I'll be good. So he ups the ante. And Jesus the truth teller says,

³⁸ *“Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!*

He says, let me to how this is coming out. Not only will you not lay down your life for me, that's not the point I'm laying down my life for you.

What's fascinating to me is that only, it was only a few hundred years ago that we put chapters and verses in. We did that, right, before it was just all together and so we have a break here and usually a preacher like me stops and says whatever you do don't be like Peter shooting off your mouth and not producing and you know, let's not do that. But Jesus doesn't do that. He doesn't miss a beat. He says, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times, don't let your hearts be troubled, like it's in the next breath.

John 14:1 *“Don't let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.*

2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back to take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

4 *You know the way and where I am going.*”

5 *Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where [there’s that word keeps popping up.] we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

6 *Jesus answered, “I am the way [I am the way you can put the emphasis wherever you want, I am the **way**] and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

7 *If you really know me, you will know[b] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

8 *[Philip. Now he chimes in and says] “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”*

9 *Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? [three years, he’s been among them] Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?*

10 *Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.*

11 *Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.*

You know my opening. If you've known me at all or heard me at all over the years, you know that my opening word in any question to start any conversation. Well, here's the sentence. Where are you from originally or some variation on that theme? That's where I start. I don't ask you what your job is. I don't ask you how tall you are, I don't ... you know none of that, okay. And the key word is 'where'. Jesus is on a 33 year journey on planet earth to redeem us. And you've heard me say this many times, but when I first came here to DC in '93 and I was on Capitol Hill, I'm trying to figure out how to phrase the good news in nonreligious terms like in not churchy terms like Christianese or whatever. And I just had this thought that here's the Gospel in a nutshell, and you've heard me say this many times. Jesus says Foth, here's the deal, I'll leave my place that's a where, I'll my place, I'll come to your place, I'll take your place, then we'll go to my place. That's the good news in a nutshell. So where are you going, Jesus? He says in essence to the father. Where's the father? In me. And I hear that and I say, huh, how does that work? Maybe I'm the only one that says, huh. But how does that work? That statement, I am the way, the truth and the life is the game changer. It's the pivot point. It's the fulcrum, if you will, in the balance. And the foundation to the phrase or the sentence is, I am.

We've heard it before, if you go back to the Old Testament, there's this 80 year old shepherd, when he was 40, he lived in Egypt and he was in the royal household and a big dude and then he kills the guy and he runs for his life. Forty years he's herding sheep, he goes out one morning, a bush is out there in the desert, it's on fire. It's a talking bush. You can read this in Exodus three, I won't go back over it, but his name was Moses. And it was this dramatic moment that reads like this; Moses said to God, because God had an assignment, he wants him to go back to Egypt and lead the people out. Well, he's a wanted guy. His picture is like in every post office in Egypt, and so he, you know, he doesn't want to do that. And he says, Moses said to God, suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they asked me what's his name? Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. There's that word, that's that phrase. I am. I am who I am. This is what you're to say to the Israelites. I am has sent

me to you. What kind of name is that? You've heard me say this often, clearly it's not a western name because that would be I do that I do. This is I am that I am. This is the most meaningful word, the most secure name in the universe. When everything else goes up in smoke, he still is. And you come into the Gospels and you hear that same language.

I love the dramatic moments that you see in the stories that are told. Jesus has just fed those 5,000 like the boy I was telling you about it right at the front end, he's just fed those, sends the disciples across the lake. It's at night. They're rowing against the wind. One of the account says there three miles out, Jesus is up on the hillside, he comes walking on the water. This is how it reads.

[Matthew 14] 25 *Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.* 26 *When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.* [Well, I guess so! When was the last time you saw somebody walking on a lake?]

27 *But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

And the phrase, the Greek language that is used is this phrase, ego ami. Ego ami means I am. Literally, he said, take courage, I am, don't be afraid. He puts this stable, meaningful centerpiece, right at the heart of a sentence. When I shared this a couple of years back, because I, you know, people like me, we say the same things over and over and over again in different ways. It takes 17 times before people buy it, you can check that out. Some of you're looking at me like I don't believe that. Well, believe me; it takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of times me saying it to myself to believe it.

I have a Jewish friend now gone, who said, I grew up in Brooklyn hearing my mother say, Art, grow up, get a good job, marry a nice Jewish girl. Art, grow up, get a good job, marry a nice Jewish girl. He said, I heard that so much I thought it was one word. So this phrase, "take courage, I am, don't be afraid" I think it said, I mean he had to shout it in the storm. TAKE COURAGE, I AM, DON'T BE AFRAID. 'I am' is right at the heart of it.

There are seven 'I am' statements in the gospel of John. He uses the phrase I think 24 times, but there are seven 'I am' statements and they are these.

- I am the bread of life.
- I am the light of the world.
- I am the door.
- I am the good shepherd.
- I am the resurrection and the life.
- I am the vine.
- I am the way, the truth, and the life.

What kinds of names are those? What are those metaphors about? Well, whatever it means to be human, he's that. Whatever I need for the journey, he's that. Whatever I need to redeem my past, he's that. Whatever gives meaning to my present, he's that. Whatever hope I need for the future, he's that.

I shared these same statements 17 years ago at Union Station to this congregation. The date was September 9, 2001 and two days later it's embedded in our brain 9/11. The message then, there was a different message, but this core was still there its called security unlimited. Here is the great I am, the most stable person in the universe who comes and offers himself to us and his disciples that night and says, I am the way.

So this weekend, that's what we're talking about. The earliest self description we hear of his followers, they're called the way, Acts nine. Here's Saul, here's this guy who says, this guy is a blasphemer, this Jesus. We're going to kill everybody who follows him, and it says, meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

Act 9 1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest

2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, that would put them in prison in Jerusalem.

And we need to understand this, he's talking to a Jewish audience. Torah is understood as the as the first five books of what we call the Old Testament, but it's also the whole of the writings in the Old Testament and it's understood that Hebrew people were laying out a way in which Israel might experience wholeness and connect to the father. Think about how radical to a Jewish mind it was when Jesus of Nazareth stated, I am the way. I mean he's putting himself on the same level with Torah, if you will. Jesus asserts that only as one accesses God the father through him could one expect to have a relationship. You know the primary way in which Jesus among quote, what generally people call religious leaders, differentiates himself, is that other religious leaders, whether it's Krishna or Buddha or whomever, they are way show-ers. That's how they describe themselves or are described way show-ers or signposts, pointing away from themselves to some other place. Jesus comes along and says, look right here I am the way, that's how it is. None of the others actually claimed to be the way.

John Stott wrote in his classic book Basic Christianity; Jesus was not just another signpost, but the destination to which the signposts had lead. He's the divine logos, the Torah. It says, only

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1

I can't do enough things, obey enough laws, follow enough rituals to get there. He's got those things covered. It's such a clear statement. It's clear that such a statement like I am the way is blasphemy to the listeners. It's blasphemy. I mean, it's ridiculous. It's outrageous, unless it's true. You know, he didn't say I am **a** way, he said, I am **the** way. That little three letter definite article really messes with your head, I am the way. And you say, but it feels so exclusive. We live in a culture, it's all about inclusion, this feels excluding, that's what it feels. But when I read Jesus, he's the most including person that I've ever read. He says, you got problems? Come here. Nobody wants you? Come here. You got this. Come here. That's how it is. I just heard Mary talk about that just a couple of moments ago. It's interesting. It feels exclusive unless it's true.

I mean, think about it. Nobody argues about the composition of water. Okay? Its two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen. You can't go with three parts hydrogen, seven parts oxygen or nine parts hydrogen, 36 parts oxygen and still have water. It's two h's and one o that's what brings life that's what water is. It just is. That's just how it is. So what are my options here? Well, it's either Jesus is just absolutely arrogant and I think CS Lewis says, has the brain of a poached egg or something or it's true. It doesn't allow for me to say, well, it just a, I'm going to follow him because he's a good teacher or he's a good organizer or a philosopher or a thought leader or a moralizer crusaded. Jesus wants us to believe and John wants us to believe, I don't have to, I don't have to believe, but it's jarring when he puts that **the** in there. I'm just saying in a fomo culture, in a fear of missing out where I may have other options when you throw that **the** in there at that makes me grit my teeth. I'm just saying.

So my observation is that we live in a culture that has so many options. I talk to lots of young people and one a few weeks ago I said, you know, my observation is that a lot of times you're paralyzed by options. There are so many options, so in a culture of a thousand doors, a culture of a thousand ways you know it can be fame, it could be mindfulness, it can be money, it can be power of the God in you, adventure, intellectual prowess, human relationships, philosophies. A lot of good things, just none of them are big enough to be God. And here he comes along and says, I got this, here's the way, come here and I'm thinking, what a gift when I'm trying to figure all this stuff out, and he says, here we are, this is how it happens.

John 14:11 says,

11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

They'd been with them three years; they've seen him walk on the water, feed 10,000 people with a little bag lunch. They've seen him raise the dead, they've seen all these things, he said, if for no other reason, believe that, go with that.

I love the stories in John, I think John 9 in particular, I really like. That's the story of the guy blind from birth and Jesus heals him you know it's the mud in the eye one where he goes and washes out and he comes back and he is so different because he sees now. He's so different than how he walks. His neighbors don't recognize him and when he's challenged because they said, well, Jesus did this on the wrong day, or he did it in the wrong way, or he's not supposed to.. His response is this; I don't know. All I know is I was blind, now I can see we're good. That's his response and Jesus is saying to Phillip, if for no other reason, just go with the evidence, go with what you've seen. And I meet people who have met Jesus and have transformed lives. You know, I was brought up in church and so I feel sometimes I feel like, man, I wish I'd done something really gross, but I just did a little grossness here and there and so at least in my mind, which is why we don't judge by what I do. But Jesus is the way, the way to where or what? Jesus is saying; it sounds like, this is about me, this is a Foth paraphrase; sounds like this is about me, fellows, but it's about my father. And Philip says, well, show us the father and we're good, and he says, you're looking at him, Phillip. He comes to reveal the father. What's the purpose of Jesus in the world to reveal the father before the night's out, when he's giving these comments, before the nights out, he's going to be curled up in the fetal position in the Garden of Gethsemane talking to

his dad saying, Papa, if there is any way to take this cup, if there's any way not to do the cross, again, Foth paraphrase, let's do that, nevertheless, I trust you. He knew that down the road Foth would need him. He knew that down the road you and I would need our lives transformed and need direction and a path and a way to go. And I say, why are you the way Jesus? If you wish to understand my father's heart, look at me, Jesus said. If you want to know his reach or his purposes or the essence of him, look at me. It's a one of a kind connection, the only begotten of the Son. I don't know what to do with that except try to deal with it in some way.

There's a great picture from the early 1960's of John F Kennedy at his desk and John John, both of these men are now gone. John John is under the desk, a two year old, most powerful man in the world, if you will, essentially, and his two year old boy is under the desk peeking at you and you and you don't try to analyze that. That's not about a creator, a doctrine or some political philosophy. It has emotion to it. It's just what it is. It's just this idea that there is a unique, a unique connection, and Jesus is saying, my connection is the deepest one. We're not exactly the same, but we are one. We are the father and son.

Hebrews puts it this way, later

Hebrews 1:1 *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,*

2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, [Literally the language says in Son] whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

So, I am the way. The word means not just a path or a road; sometimes it means a course of conduct. We say, boy, she has such a way about her; it's a manner of thinking and acting. Here is Paul who comes along and says, let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus. The mind, what is his mind like? Well, I think it's portrayed in the story of the Prodigal son, what we call the story of the Prodigal son or the gracious father. Here's a kid who takes his inheritance and soils the family name, goes off into a far country and you know, he just messes everything up. And when the boy ends up with pigs in a far country, which for a Jewish kid to be in a foreign land, slopping hogs is like the worst. He remembers the way home.

I gotta tell ya, I like to chart my own course, I like to go my own way, I like to do my own thing and there I was at the Pomona County Fair. I just wanted to see the pigs. That's all I wanted to do and I wandered off, I lost my way, I took a wrong turn, I got disconnected from my mom and my sister, the relationships that made my life worth it. I got disconnected and a kindly cop found me crying, Eskimo pie dripping off my elbow. I thought I'd lost my mother and my sister, the relationships were gone, I was in a wilderness. Life is a wilderness. We've not been this way before. There's so many options, there are pitfalls and dead ends and box canyons and mountains and swamps and things and people who wish to take me places not for my own good. In a wilderness where you've never been before, you've never been around there. My friend Gordon Fee says what you need in the wilderness, well, a map doesn't help because you got to know where you are for starters, for a map to work, compass isn't quite enough, it can't get you there.

What you need is a guide. What you need is someone who knows the way. In the case of Jesus, someone who is the way. I am the way is all about my where. Where am I from? Where do I belong? Where do I find meaning? Where do I find wholeness? Where do I find community? Where do I make a difference? Where do I invest my days and where am I ultimately going. In a culture desperate for direction Jesus comes along and says, right here, I'm the way, step into me, so when my father, whom I'm here to reveal looks at you, he sees me. And when all is said and done, let's go to my father's place, he has a room ready. That's perfect.

Father, thank you for your grace and your mercy in our lives expressed through Jesus. Thank you that your heart is fully expressed in him. Thank you that when we take wrong turns, you find us in the silliest, saddest places and tag us and say you're it. Thank you for your reckless love, your unending grace, and the fact that you are bold enough, a truth teller enough to say, I am the way. Here we go. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.