

- I need to give credit for some of the key insights and the basic approach to the text to Eugene M. Boring and Fred Craddock in their 'Peoples' New Testament Commentary.

John 14:6 'I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'.

John 14:1-6 is a 'go to' passage at funerals. It makes sense to read it at funerals, and it makes sense to read it with a family member or friend who is dying. Jesus comforts troubled hearts here. Jesus speaks good news in words that are clear and strong. We need all of these around death. But I feel some relief to read this passage today and no one has died.

Because this is not a funeral service we have some freedom to listen with a different set of ears. I think that will be helpful to us. The disciples' problem was not, 'what happens when we die?' It was, 'how do we live without Jesus? How do we follow him now? And where is Jesus, what is he doing?'

Think back to 2008 for a moment. What were you doing? Where did you live? What was happening in your life? How much has changed in three years?

That is about how long Jesus and his friends had been together. Now, Jesus is leaving them. How can that be? What will they do?

Remember the very first question asked of Jesus in this gospel? "Teacher, where are you staying?" (John 1:38) Where are you Jesus?

This statement then, comes to us framed by questions about where Jesus is now and what he is doing. (see John 13:1ff) Jesus is with the Father, in a place that has room for us all. Somehow, in his absence from us, he is making things ready for us. Somehow, he will come back for us. (at our death? At his second coming?) he **will** come back.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”.

Its Basic Assumptions

Jesus' words assume at least three things.

1. That there is more to life than meets the eye. There is more to life than we can see or touch or measure. They assume that God is. That there is a Creator. This world is not an accident. There is One who is holding the world together. Some scientists are suggesting that there may be a direct link from global warming and melting glaciers to the shifting of tectonic plates that resulted in the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. That would change one big question from, 'God how can you let this happen?', to 'what are we doing to the creation?' And yet God holds the world together.

The words of Jesus assume that there is a Light in the world, shining and giving light to all people. There is more to you and more to me than meets the eye. We are not simply physical beings, but spiritual creatures.

2. There is more **beyond** this life. The end of this life is not the end. Many years ago, in Ontario I was part of a 'Multi-Faith Committee' to oversee the

delivery of chaplaincy services in provincial institutions. The 'Multifaith' Information Manual told us just what different faith groups and communities believed and practiced. I read through it this week. Some faith groups dare to speak with more confidence than others, and the ideas of the life to come vary a lot, but there are very few that believe that to die is to be extinguished. (Unitarianism is one of the few) Eternity is in our hearts.

3. That humanity is asking questions. These words of Jesus assume that people are wondering about the way ahead, longing to know what is true and hoping for life. The 'I am' of Jesus, is the '**I am**' of recognition. (B+C) At an Oiler's game, they sell tickets for a 'fifty-fifty' draw. Everyone knows there will be a winner. A number is read, someone jumps up and says, 'I am!' 'It's me!' When Jesus says, 'I am' here and in the rest of the gospel, he is saying, 'you **all** know there must be some way, some truth, some life... 'It's me!' I am the way, the truth and the life, you can stop looking now!

Its Exclusive Claim

Another Ontario story, this one from even farther back in the mists of time. We were camping at a provincial park and had taken our two little kids to one of the park programs. The park interpreter thought she would strike a blow for gender equality as she taught the kids about the true value of trees. She read from Shel Silverstein's book, 'The Giving Tree'. It's about a boy and a tree that become an old man and a stump. To work in the gender equality angle she held up the book and said, 'this is a story about a young girl and her friend the tree'.

But the **picture** was of a boy. So Andrew, about three years old, said, 'that's not a girl, it's a boy!'

Jesus says, '**I am** the way, the truth and the life'.

That is an exclusive claim. We cannot water it down.

The exclusive claim offends our modern ears. (B+C) We live in a society with all kinds of religions. We have friends and neighbours, and relatives who have different beliefs than we do. As we look around at the world we see that sometimes strong religious beliefs lead to arguments and violence and we sense that these could be used as fighting words. We just want everyone to get along. I will admit to feeling a bit uneasy with it.

The exclusive claim is music to the ears of some. Christians who love Jesus may celebrate the exclusivity and use it to shore up their own theology or even to bash people of other faiths. The assurance in this passage can lead to a comfort that 'we are right, they are all wrong'.

As Dr. Peter Borgdorff introduced the Belhar Confession at classis last week, (a confessional statement that came out of the struggle over apartheid in South Africa.) he talked about how the need to be 'right' is part of our DNA as Christian Reformed people. I knew what he was talking about. I don't know if anyone ever said, 'we are right', but I was pretty sure that all other Christians would be happier Christians and better Christians if they could only become CRC. Needing to be 'right' can leave us with blind spots and prevent us from learning what God may want us to learn from other Christians and from other

faiths. An emphasis on 'being right' also may send us out into the world judging others as either 'right or wrong'.

I wonder if there might be a fear lurking in the weeds here. Could it be that a reaction in us **against** the exclusive claim here is a fear that God could turn out to be cruel and punishing? That Japanese babies and families, shopkeepers and farmers and young people in love who never made the same personal confession of faith in Jesus are lost forever?

Is there a fear that other faiths may have something valuable that we need to learn? A fear that even considering the question is a slippery slope?

Let's see what happens if we trust that Jesus is full of grace and truth and trust John to tell the story.

Its Joyful Good News

(Boring and Craddock) Jesus does not start out by assuming there are all kinds of ways to God, and then narrow them down until finally he claims to be the one. Nowhere in the Bible is it assumed that there are all kinds of ways to God and it's up to people to find one that works for them.

The Bible says that sinful humanity has cut itself off from God. Our 'natural state is this:' We have **all** gotten into boats, travelled to a far country and then burned our boats on the beach. We have closed off our access to God. There is no way back. We are 'dead in sin'. There is no way back to God from the human side. In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul spells this out really

clearly. We, that is, sinful humanity have bombed all bridges home. There is no way back to the garden. No way at all.

Now here is the good news.

God has been building a bridge, God has been seeking the lost, God has made a way for us. The way to God, to the Creator, the giver of Light and Life is now open through what God has done in Jesus Christ.

When there is **no way** back to God, and a way is open, that is good news!

(B+C) The text does not claim that all people of other faiths are doomed if they do not personally confess Christ before they die. The text says that all who come to God, come to the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. To see Jesus is to see the Father. Jesus and the Father are one. Whoever comes to God comes to this God, the only God there is, whether or not this is the way they would understand it, whether or not they have a conscious awareness of the God revealed in Jesus. For John, faith in God is nothing else than faith in the God revealed in Jesus, for it is this God who is the Creator, Sustainer and Life-Giver to all people. This fits with the Jewish claim that there is only one God, and that whoever worships God worships the God revealed as the Creator and Redeemer in Jewish history, Scripture and tradition.

Jesus does not just show the way, preach the truth and call us to life. He **is** the way, the truth and the life. The way is open to all. Let's follow. Let **us** show Jesus. Let **us** speak truthfully, let **us** call friends, neighbours, family members to life in Jesus.

God welcomes us in Jesus to his table.

The Lord be gracious to you. The Lord be gracious to me. And all God's people said, Amen.