

**I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT
THROUGH ME**

Sermon for the 5th Sunday of Easter, 2020

John 14:6

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 14:6 **“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

No one could predict 12 months ago what we are facing today. Who would have thought that the doors of our churches would be shut for a time! It has been a surreal feeling – something big that is now missing in our lives. Like myself, I hope you all have taken the time to realise just how blessed we have been by the Lord in the past. What a privilege it truly has been to come into His house for worship and for fellowship! Hopefully, we won't have to wait much longer before we can do so again.

But not only were we unable to predict the shutting of the church doors, but we also cannot predict the future of our church, full stop. Yes, we can look around and make some kind of assessment of how we think we are travelling, but it's always in the back of some minds, *“What is going to become of our church? We are all getting older, and it is challenging to hold on to our young. Our resources are stretched. 5-10 years from now, what is going to happen?”*

All I can say is “Don't panic!” Jesus Himself says not to worry about tomorrow.¹ From now till the time of His Second Coming, the Gospel teaching that Jesus is the Christ will continue to be preached. Besides, since the LORD says that His Word *“...will not return to Me without results but will accomplish what I desire and be successful in what I have sent it to do”* (Isaiah 55:11) I think we are in good hands. We shall think about the here and now, thanking the Lord for His Word to us, and trusting that He will never leave us and our future generations.

What we possess as children of God is a blessed heritage. As the Small Catechism states, God the Holy Spirit has *“called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”* We look around us and see panic and confusion, chaos and disorder – all as a result of sin, and we must rejoice that these momentary afflictions² are just that – momentary. Our heritage is that we have been called out of this chaos and are encouraged when we hear these words from Jesus Himself, **“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

What a thing to say, and what a time to say it! Jesus spoke these words the night of His betrayal when He was in the upper room with His disciples. He had predicted His betrayal, and Judas had disappeared into the darkness. Being so bold, Peter had declared that he would never abandon Jesus, making Jesus reply that Peter would deny Him three times before the night was over.³ Betrayal. Denial. Death. Things are going to crash down soon, and if Jesus was going to be put to death, where would the disciples go? These are men who cared enough about spiritual matters to abandon all and follow Jesus; but if He is dead, what is left? Perhaps they could turn to the Pharisees, who preached salvation by way of behaviour - that one could be saved by keeping their rules. However, Jesus Himself had called them *“whitewashed graves”* (Matthew 23:27). That is, they looked very good and pious on the outside, but inside they were *“full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”* (v. 28). There is no salvation there. Maybe the disciples could check out the Greeks. In the tradition of Aristotle and Plato, the Greeks still placed high regard on knowledge and truth. They had done so much with philosophy and their study of man - why he is the way he is, and how the world should be. But despite all the knowledge, the world still isn't that way. No salvation there, either.

¹ Matthew 6:25-34

² 2 Corinthians 4:17

³ John 13:38

Then again, there were numerous heathen religions around, all pointing to their oracles as ways that people could get in touch with a god and achieve real life. Still, everyone's experience is so different that none of it makes sense in the end. So, in the end, there is no hope.

Therefore, it all comes back to the same question: If Jesus was to die, what will the disciples do? There is nowhere else to turn - no way, no truth, no life. And it is here that Jesus declares, despite His impending death that He is "**the Way, the Truth and the Life**" and that "**No one comes to the Father except through Me.**"

Jesus is **the Way**, the only Way, to the Father - the only Way by which any man can approach God and stand righteous before Him. Jesus' disciples knew this. Jesus Himself had taught them this Way, and they had learnt this lesson well. On one occasion, when Jesus had asked them: "*Who do you say that I am?*" Peter, as a spokesman for all the disciples, quickly answered: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" (Matthew 16:16).

This glorious response from the disciples was not held only to them. Martha made a similar and equally glorious confession when she said, "*Lord, I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world*" (John 11:27). All true followers of Jesus during the apostolic times believed and confessed Jesus as **the Way**.

How sad then, that by the time of the 16th century, people such as Martin Luther and thousands with him, though reared within the visible Christian Church, could spend the early part of their years without knowing Jesus as **the Way**. How was it that Luther and many people of the church of his day trembled at the very mention of the name Jesus instead of rejoicing that in Jesus they had **the Way** that leads directly to the Throne of Grace and to the heart of the heavenly Father? The answer: The Church had permitted the only Way to be covered up with the rubbish of human traditions and superstitions and the filth of false doctrines.

So it was that by God's grace, Luther was permitted to find and restore Jesus to the world as **the Way**. Through the Reformation, Christ Jesus was once more brought into the hearts and homes of men. Sadly, however, later in history, danger once again reared its ugly head. Like a venomous snake, rationalism threatened the life of true Christianity. Rationalism taught that human reason, or understanding, was the sole source and final test of all truth.

What about now? We live in the present - not in the past. Well, unfortunately, rationalism is still at work in our own country, along with modernism. Modernism attempts to destroy our faith in Jesus as **the Way** by promoting the importance of natural science applied to prior claims of truth and a progressive and optimistic attitude toward change. The Bible is viewed as nothing more than a record of religious experiences of Old and New Testament times. Man must have faith in his inherent capability for his development for a good life. In other words, there is no room for someone like Jesus or what He says in His Word. Man can get along just fine without Him. So, many 'learned' people, when talking of the future, will tell of a world of progress, of a life made more comfortable or pleasant by the ingenuity of man and the fantastic progress he has achieved. But let us not overlook this possibility: The world of tomorrow may be a world of sorrow.

Come what may, we know one thing: we need more than the material things of life, we need more than financial and social security. We need the One who is **the Way** and who leads us into the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. We need Him who can give us the calming assurance: "*Fear not, I am with you.*" We need Jesus as **the Way**. We have Him. Let us keep Him. He will lead us safely and securely.

"**I am the Truth**" Jesus says. As **the Truth**, He has revealed the Father's truth. He has revealed Himself as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. His followers believed in Him as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. They knew Him to be **the Truth** and His Word to be truth.

We have already mentioned that the world covered up **the Way**, and it was through the Reformation that God restored Jesus as **the Way**, but the Reformation also showed men that Jesus is **the Truth**, the only Truth, and praise God that all of you have inherited the wondrous spiritual blessings that today you know Jesus as **the Truth!**

This is comforting because life is not always sunshine and rainbows. At times it can get you down. When you don't know where to turn to for strength or support, when it appears that everything here on earth is against you, you need to know that the Lord is still your Help and Stay. When you seek Him, He will be found, and He will comfort you. He will speak to you through His Word with such wonderful, blessed, and calming assurances. When the Israelites had to endure captivity, they could easily despair, so the LORD spoke to them saying, "*Do not be afraid! For I am with you. Do not be alarmed! For I am your God; I shall strengthen you. Yes, I shall help you. Yes,*

I shall support you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). He speaks these same words to you too. Strengthened by God's own assurance, you may face the issues of life with renewed courage and confidence because you are His children.

But more so, when it is your sins that get you down, when, like a heavy burden resting upon you, they threaten to crush you and to bring you to the brink of despair; when you know that you have departed from the Lord and have nothing but a bundle of filthy sins to carry, do you think you need to bear them on your own? Absolutely not! Remember what your Lord, the One who is **the Truth** says to you? *"Come unto me.... and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). *"Your sins are forgiven. You do not have to carry the burden of your sins, because I already have. I have purchased your salvation with My blood."* Go to the Lord in repentance and confess your sins to Him. In Psalm 34, David wrote, *"The eyes of the LORD are on righteous people, and His ears are attentive to their cry"* (v. 15). The Lord always hears us when we speak to Him and never withholds His forgiveness from us.

What a blessing to have Jesus as **the Way** and **the Truth**, but what are you going to do with these great spiritual treasures? Great blessings bring great opportunities, but they also bring great responsibilities. One of the first things to do is to keep this great heritage of your faith. Keep the truth which you have. Gladly share these blessings with others. Stand up and be counted! Stand as soldiers of Christ, in the midst of the conflict, in the surging onslaught of modernism or in the equally dangerous indifference of our age, holding up the banners of Christ to bring His truth and light to a world that does not know Him.

There is no doubt about it. We are living in ominous times and the issue today is this: Will the Church adhere to the Gospel of Christ, or will she let the gods of modernism and a social gospel destroy the precious doctrine of Jesus as the Christ of God and His blood as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world? We, as a church, have the saving truth, and surely we would want to go forth and preach the Gospel.

"But it isn't that easy," says your Old Adam. *"I don't have the courage to tell others about Jesus. I'm afraid what they may think of me. In fact, they will probably look down on me and laugh and scoff at me."* You're right, it isn't always easy, and could be downright dangerous. Jesus once told His disciples: *"They will hand you over to be afflicted and will kill you, and all nations will hate you because of My name"* (Matthew 24:9). In every generation, there are some who oppose Jesus' cause and so seek to harm His Church.

No, it will not always be easy, but it will always be interesting. And if in your lifetime, you only bring one person to the knowledge of Jesus through your humble efforts, or through your testimony, then your job is done. So go, bring Jesus, **the Truth**, to a sin-lost world. Don't keep the Good News to yourself. Do not be afraid to go into the world and tell others of the hope that you have. Your Saviour is counting on you!

Finally, Jesus says that He is **"The Life."** Life! What a significant word. Everyone values his life. But real life, the life which truly counts, can be had only when we have Jesus as **the Life**.

By nature, we are all selfish and self-centred. To us, there is nothing more important than the capital "I." I want this; I want that, and so on. But when the grace of God enters the heart of a sinner, it draws a horizontal line through the capitalised "I" and converts it into a cross, the cross of Christ, which thereafter looms so large in our lives. When this happens, we stand beside the Apostle Paul and proclaim, *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21). Living as Christians, we live by Christ's grace, in His image, to serve as Christ the people around us. If we die, we learn the fullness of what we had known in part and our fallen human nature no longer hinders us. It's a "win-win" situation.

Dear friends, you belong to Christ. No matter the circumstances of life you now find yourself in, Christ will dominate your life. That does not mean that you will be free from trouble or temptations. No - the devil and his helpers will always try to deceive and seduce you into unbelief and all manner of vice - you can expect that.

So don't be deceived. Remember, *"you have been bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your bodies!"* (1 Corinthians 6:20). Live to the glory of your Saviour. Living for Christ means working for Christ. It means being active as a Christian, as a church member. It means diligently using the means of grace, God's Word and Sacrament, and placing your time and talents, your interests and your efforts, at the feet of Jesus in willing and grateful service. Don't be afraid of the future. Leave that in the Lord's capable hands.

But for now, the banner of the Lord must go onward from victory unto victory until the kingdoms of the earth have become the kingdoms of the Lord. You have a share in this glorious work. You are soldiers of Christ. Jesus

says, **“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** Proclaim that to the world and pray that the world would heed this proclamation. It is a wonderful, life-giving message, so why keep it to ourselves?

May the Lord grant success in His name. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have sent Jesus, Your holy Servant, into the world, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life to redeem all people. After He had offered His life as the one sacrifice for all sins for ever, You raised Him from the dead by Your glorious power. Give us a living faith in Him, so that we may possess the sure hope of eternal life through Him.

We thank You for all Your kindness in our lives. We praise You for every blessing that You give us, and that Your mercy is never-ending.

We thank You, O Father of all light, for taking away the darkness of our minds and spirits, and for revealing to us Your Word of truth in Jesus Christ. Pour out Your Spirit on us, that He may continually plant Your Word in our hearts. Increase our willingness to study the Scriptures, and our understanding of them.

We thank You for the fellowship of believers in Your church. Keep us all in the unity that the Spirit gives, and in the peace that binds your children together. Keep us in faith in Christ Jesus, in joyful obedience, and in loyalty to Your infallible Word. Bless Your church everywhere, protect it from all its enemies, and give it success in all the work that believers do in Jesus' name.

We thank You for our Christian homes. Surround every family with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, joy, and moral purity may fill their lives.

We thank You, Lord, for the blessings that we enjoy in our rich land. Defend it, both within and without, from all who would harm it by sin, undermine it by strife and rebellion, or destroy it by war. May our nation continue its recovery from the effects of Covid-19.

Strengthen the faith of those in our midst who are suffering illness, who are bereaved, and who are lonely, or depressed in any other ways.

We thank You for health and healing, education and social joys, friends and companions, and all the beauties and wonders of Your creation. Fill us with gratitude for Your goodness, and give us opportunities to use what You give us to serve you.

Surround us all with Your love, and finally receive us into perfect, unbroken fellowship with You and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Hear these prayers in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 6:1-9, 7:2a, 51-60

¹ In those days, as the number of the disciples was multiplying, those who spoke Greek brought a complaint against those who spoke Aramaic, that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² The Twelve called the whole group of disciples together and said, “It is not satisfactory for us to give up the Word of God to serve at tables. ³ Brethren, select seven men from among you who have a good reputation and who are full of the Spirit and wisdom, and we shall put them in charge of this duty. ⁴ However, we shall devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

⁵ The proposal pleased the whole group. So, they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus from Antioch, who had previously become a Jew. ⁶ They placed these men before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ The Word of God kept on spreading. The number of disciples in Jerusalem was growing very large. Even many of the priests were becoming believers, as God wanted them to.

⁸ Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, was working great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. ⁹ Some men of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, as it was called, men from Cyrene and

Alexandria and men from Cilicia and Asia, rose up to argue with Stephen...

^{7:2a} Stephen answered, ... ⁵¹ “Stubborn people and uncircumcised in hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit. As your fathers have done it, you are doing it too. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who announced that the Righteous One would come, and now you have become the ones who have betrayed and murdered Him. ⁵³ You were the people who received the Law through angels who were directed to transmit it, but you have not kept it.”

⁵⁴ When they heard these things, they became furious and ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ However, full of the Holy Spirit, he looked intently up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ He said, “Look! I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷ However, they shouted aloud and held their ears shut. They rushed at him with one purpose, ⁵⁸ threw him out of the city and began to stone him. The witnesses laid their outer clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning Stephen, he was making an invocation and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” ⁶⁰ Then he knelt and shouted aloud, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

1 Peter 2:2-10

² Like new-born babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow up to salvation! ³ For you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ You are coming to Him, as to a living Stone, whom human beings have rejected but whom God has chosen and who is precious to Him; ⁵ and you are also being built, as living stones, to be a spiritual temple and to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says, “See, I am laying a Stone in Zion, a chosen and precious Cornerstone, and the person who believes in Him will by no means be put to shame.”

⁷ Therefore, He is precious to you who believe; but to those who do not believe, “He is the Stone, which, although rejected by the builders, has become the Cornerstone,” ⁸ and “a Stone over which they stumble and a Rock over which they fall.” They stumble because they disobey the Word. That is also the end appointed for them.

⁹ You, however, are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own special people, that you may extol the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. ¹⁰ Once you were “not a people,” but now you are “the people of God.” Once you had “not received mercy,” but now you have “received mercy.”

John 14:1-14

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled! Believe in God and believe in Me! ² In My Father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you, because I am going to prepare a place for you. ³ If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also come again and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?”

⁶ Jesus told him, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

⁷ If you have known Me, you will know My Father also and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”

⁸ Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father! Then that is enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus asked him, “Have I been with you for such a long time, and have you not known Me, Philip? The person who has seen Me has seen the Father. How do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me? These Words, which I am telling you, I am not speaking on My own authority, but the Father, who remains in Me, is doing His works. ¹¹ Believe Me, that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me. Or else, believe because of the works themselves!

¹² “Truly, truly, I tell you, the person who believes in Me will also do the works that I am doing and do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ I shall also do whatever you ask in My name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask Me for anything in My name, I shall do it.