

Pastor Jonna Bohigian
The Way, the Truth, and the Life
John 14:1 – 14

When you look back over your life, do you ever find yourself surprised by what you remember and what you don't? One of the surprising things I remember is that when I was little, my mom told me that she and dad had made a plan in case they died. I remember squirming and telling her that I didn't want to talk about it. But, with a steady voice, she told me that it was a good thing to have a plan. Their plan was called a "will." And in their will, they wrote that my siblings and I would go to live with my aunt and uncle if something ever happened to them.

Though every fiber in my being resisted that conversation with my mom, I grew to be thankful for her candor about life *and* about death. I was thankful that my parents did the thing that no parent wants to do, to think about their death and about leaving their children, and making a plan for us.

No one wants to think about death and our own mortality, no matter *how* old we are. It's not pleasant, and it isn't optimistic, but sometimes we don't have a *choice* but to think about it. This pandemic is one of those times. We are surrounded by the death tolls, which proceed to increase every day, around the world. We walk around, and see people's faces covered by masks, and we don't forget for a *moment* that this is *not* normal, that this is *not* how it ought to be, and that life is precious. We think about our families, our lives, and our priorities. It would be easier to numb our minds, to stop our thoughts, but we know that we are being invited into *more*. There is more.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus has gathered with all of his disciples one last time. He knows that soon, he will die, and he doesn't want his disciples to be unprepared. He tells them that he is going somewhere they *cannot* go. He tells them that he will be betrayed by one of them, and denied by one of his closest disciples.

Can you imagine the grief, the heaviness of his disciples? They will fail their beloved friend and master, and he will leave them. Where he is going, they cannot come. Their heart drops.

Jesus, in his love and compassion, says, "Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me." (Jn 14:1). He assures them that he can be trusted. He has been with them for three years, and he has been trustworthy. He has shown his love for them, and he won't leave them alone for long. He will go to his Father's house to prepare a place for them, and he *will* come back for them. Not only that, they know the *way* to the place Jesus is going.

But Thomas, ever the pragmatist, is confused. How can they know the *way* Jesus is going if they don't know *where* he is going? This is a question many of us would ask, too. How can Google point us in the right direction if we haven't given a destination? We will get *lost* without a destination!

Jesus replies, "*I am* the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). Jesus has an interesting way of comforting his disciples. He tells them that he is preparing a place for them in his Father's house, but then he doesn't give them a direction or a destination. He instead says that *he is* the way...and the truth and the life.

Let's pause here. Jesus has described *himself* as the way, the truth, and the life, the *only* way to the Father. This is the kind of statement that makes many of us uncomfortable. Maybe we can just avoid statements like this and pretend they don't exist, because this sounds exclusive. It doesn't sound very loving, frankly. How could Jesus claim to have a corner on the truth?

We can hear Jesus' claim and resist it for a number of reasons. We know lots of wonderful people who don't know Jesus but are "good" people. Isn't it arrogant to say that we know Jesus and know the truth, and that others therefore don't?

Last year, a study was conducted by the Barna Group to identify trends in evangelism. Their study found that 94 – 97% of "practicing Christians [believed] that part of their faith [meant] being a witness about Jesus...And that the best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to know Jesus." Yet, 47% of Millennials believed that it was at least somewhat "wrong to share one's [beliefs with someone] in hopes that they [would] one day share the same faith."¹ *Almost all believed that the best thing that could ever happen is to know Jesus, yet nearly half of Millennials believed that it was in some way wrong to evangelize.*

What is going on here? Well, there are at least a couple of factors at play. In contrast to previous generations, Millennials have on average 4 close friends and relatives who practice other religions, whereas older generations have on average 1. "Sharing the gospel today is [also] made harder than at any time in recent memory by an overall cultural resistance to conversations that highlights people's

¹ <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>

differences.”² *Millenials have more non-Christian friends and are in a cultural milieu that is less open to highlighting differences.*

It’s not so easy. The closer we get and the more we recognize the culture in which we live, the more difficult it seems to share the Jesus we find in John 14.

But is John 14 unique? Who is the Jesus we find in Scripture? He saved a woman from sure death and proceeded to tell her to “go and sin no more” (Jn 8:11b). He cast out demons. He healed people of debilitating diseases and restored them to their communities. He performed miraculous feedings and called himself the “bread of life” (Jn 6:35a). He claimed to be the Son of God, the gate for his sheep, the good shepherd, and the light of the world. He forgave sins. He was obedient to his Father. He died so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn 3:16).

Jesus had an *inclusive* love for all people. He loved, and continues to love, all people, even those who reject him. And that love cost him everything he had, even his own life. He knew that people would reject him, yet he died anyway. His love was costly. And his love was for a purpose – that all who believe in him might have *life, abundant life.*

Jesus had an *inclusive* love for all people, yet an *exclusive* relationship with the Father. He criticized those who claimed to know God but rejected Jesus. He claimed that it simply was not *possible* to know God and yet to reject Jesus. To know Jesus was to know the Father.

² <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>

I understand those who wish that Jesus didn't make these claims. I understand those who wish that he instead claimed that all paths lead in the same direction. It seems so much more loving, to allow all roads to lead to God.

But is that how love works? Is love indulgent and says that anything goes? Is love permissive and blind? *Doesn't* love instead have expectations? *Doesn't* love challenge us and sharpen us? *Doesn't* love give us the confidence to look ourselves in the mirror and recognize that we have a long way to go? *Doesn't* love tell us the painful truth? *Doesn't* love have demands, and *isn't* love exclusive?

Another memory I have is from 6 years ago, on the day of our wedding. I had been told that I wouldn't remember anything on that day, but I *distinctly* remember something the pastor spoke over us on that special day. With a smile, he said, "The goal of marriage is to make you holy, not to make you happy." *The goal of marriage is to make you holy, not to make you happy.* His words rang distinctly in my ears, not because they were new, but because I had heard that line plenty of times before. I knew it was true. The goal of marriage is to make us more and more like Jesus, not more and more like ourselves.

A friend of mine once said, "Marriage has taught me how selfish I am." I recognized glimpses of that truth, when I got married. I wanted Alek to be an addendum to my life, but I didn't want to be challenged by him. I would complain, "Why don't you just let me do whatever I want? And why do you have to have an opinion on everything?" He would respond with a laugh, "You married me, and this is who I am. I am not going to shy away from telling you what I think." These

conversations were lighthearted, but they truly got at the heart of something deep within me. I am selfish, and I want things exactly how I want them.

And that's just the point – marriage, and life, are not meant to fulfill all of our desires, but to make us holy, to become like Jesus. The painful truth is that love does not leave us as we are. Love challenges us and reveals to us the truth.

This was, and is, the way of Jesus. He pierces through our selfishness, and reveals the truth. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

During this time when the world is pruned of many of her earthly confidences, she will turn to something greater than herself. She will turn to something deeper, something she can rely on, something that gives her hope. She will look to the church.

In the fourth century, the people of Caesarea had been hit by war, famine, *and* a plague. It was simply too much, so many left for the countryside. But at least one group remained, the Christians. The bishop of Caesarea, named Eusebius, wrote this, “All day long...[the Christians tend] to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them. Others [gather] together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and [distribute] bread to them all.” He went on to write that “because of their compassion in the midst of the plague, the Christians’ ‘deeds were on everyone’s lips, and [the people] glorified the God of the Christians. Such actions convinced them that they alone were pious and truly reverent to God.” A pagan priest commented three decades later, “[They] support not only their poor, but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”³

³ <https://biblemesh.com/blog/the-compassion-of-early-christians/>

The church, when following the way of Jesus, is a beacon of hope, a light which cannot be hidden. The church, when following the way of Jesus, selflessly gives of her comforts to inclusively love all people. The church, when following the way of Jesus, proudly bears the loving and exclusive truth that Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life, the only hope for all the world.

For God so loved this world
 He gave His only Son
 That we might know the mystery Of His love, of His great love The only perfect One

Became the sin of all
 With outstretched mercy arms He died to save, He died to save

So let Him be high
 Let Him be lifted up
 For all to see
 For all to know true love
 The only hope for all the world Is Jesus⁴

Church, may we be *emboldened*, to love our neighbor and to share Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life, the only hope for all the world.

Yes we will glorify the name of the One who never fails. Join with us to sing.

⁴ [https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.ccvonline.com/external_site_v7/music/rising-up/lyrics/High%20and%20Lifted%20Up%20\(LYR\).pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.ccvonline.com/external_site_v7/music/rising-up/lyrics/High%20and%20Lifted%20Up%20(LYR).pdf)