

Well, today is Palm Sunday. Jesus is at the gates of Jerusalem near the end of His earthly journey and His destination with the cross. On this day, Jesus received the kind of welcome that we all hope that He will always receive. The disciples placed their garments on the donkey for a saddle, and people spread their coats along the road while others waved palm branches to prepare the way for Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem. Not only that, but the crowd shouted: "Hosanna," which means "save us." This is exactly what we all want Jesus to do – save us. The crowds also cheered: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

It was Palm Sunday, but because of a sore throat, five-year-old Annie stayed home from church with her mother. When the rest of the family returned home, they were carrying palm branches. Annie asked them what they were for. Her father told her that the people waved them as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt. "Wouldn't you know it," Annie fussed, "the one Sunday that I'm sick and Jesus shows up and offers pony rides."

The question is – did the people standing alongside the road that day truly understand what was happening, and more importantly, what was going to happen in the coming week? They had heard about Jesus and all the miracles that He had performed. Therefore, most likely they came more out of curiosity to see Jesus than belief in Him as the Son of God. Did they realize that before the week was over their cheers of "Hosanna" would turn to cries of "Crucify Him?" In a way they represented the fickle human race, following the latest fad and not taking the time to truly understand who Jesus Christ is.

Are we like them, here only out of curiosity, or do we truly want to know who Jesus is? As Jesus nears the end of His earthly journey, we approach the end of our journey through Lent for this year. So, let me ask you this question: are you any closer to the Lord today than you were on Ash Wednesday? Have each of you answered the question that Jesus asked in Matthew 16:15 – "Who do you say that I am?" Has your personal relationship with Jesus and your knowledge of Him grown over the past five weeks?

It has been my hope and prayer that each one of us has grown in our personal relationship with the Lord as we have examined this question of exactly who is Jesus Christ. That's why we have been focusing on the seven "I Am" sayings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John during these Sundays of Lent. I also hope that from these discussions you have gained some new insights into who Jesus is, why He came to live among us, and what He expects of us. For the past five weeks, you have heard Jesus identify Himself as the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Gateway to God, the Good Shepherd, and last Sunday, the True Vine. There are only two remaining "I Am" sayings. I'm saving the last one for Easter morning – "I am the

Resurrection and the Life.” So, this morning, let’s look at the other saying from the fourteenth chapter of John, the first seven verses.

Read John 14:1-7

Now you probably recognize the first part of this passage which is normally used at celebrations of life; however, this morning I want to focus on Jesus’ reply to Thomas’ question. Did you ladies listen carefully to the fifth verse that I just read? Thomas said “Master, we have no idea where you are going. How do you expect us to know the road?” Here’s one of the few times in life that you will find a man admitting that he doesn’t know which way to go, and he even asks for directions.

You know today we have these GPS navigation systems and smartphones to help find the directions to a certain location. If you have ever used one, you know that you punch in your destination and a woman’s voice comes on and tells you which way to go and when to turn. The only trouble is that she doesn’t know when to shut up. For example, I’m sitting in the proper turning lane with my turn signals on waiting for the traffic light to change, and she keeps on saying, “Turn right here, turn right, turn right.” My wife Judy said that this was all I needed, another woman trying to tell me what to do!

But seriously, again and again Jesus had told His disciples where He was going, but somehow, they had never fully understood what He was talking about. He told them that He was returning to His Father, who had sent Him, and with whom He was one, but they just didn’t get it. And they definitely didn’t understand the road Jesus had to travel, the way of the cross. So, to say that the disciples were confused at this point would be an understatement.

Now there was one among the disciples who was not afraid to ask questions and admit that he didn’t understand, and that was Thomas. Thomas was not a man who pretended that he had faith when he did not. Thus, we should thank Thomas; for out of his doubt and question came one of the seven “I Am” sayings of Jesus. There’s a lesson here for us; don’t be afraid to express your doubts and questions about your faith and your Lord and Savior. That’s how we grow in our faith and walk with the Lord; there are no dumb questions when it comes to our relationship with the Lord. For when you seek to know the Lord better, you will find the answer!

You know we sometimes overlook the significance of Thomas’ question. Listen to it again: “Lord, we have no idea where you are going. How do you expect us to know the way?” In our discussion on John 10:7 three weeks ago, Jesus identified Himself as the gate for the sheep, the only way to God. I think most of us would agree that you must believe in and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior in order to receive salvation and eternal life. But how many of us truly know the way, the road that Jesus is calling us to follow. If you have a basic knowledge of

geography, you have a general idea of where Chicago or New York City is, but do you know which roads to take in order to get there?

But in our text this morning, Jesus is not talking about a geographical location. In Psalm 119, the word “way” is used as a metaphor to describe a life lived in accordance with the will of God; it was a way of life, a practice. In Deuteronomy 5:32-33, Moses told the Israelites that if they wanted a good and long life, they should follow the way that the Lord had commanded them. “To know the way” is to know Jesus Himself. Throughout the Gospel of John, location is consistently used as a symbol for a relationship with Jesus and His Father. Jesus was telling Thomas and us today that He has already shown us the way in His teachings and how He lived His life. If we follow them, we will get to our destination; a personal relationship with Jesus, not only in this life, but in the life to come.

Jesus said to Thomas: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” He did not claim to teach the way or give instruction about the truth, or to present a way, but to **be** the Way, to **be** the Truth, and to **be** the Life. In the time remaining this morning, let’s discuss each of these three descriptions in more detail. First, what did Jesus mean by saying that He was the Way. Suppose you are in a strange town and ask for directions to a certain tourist attraction. And the person that you ask tells you to take the first right, then the second left, go across the square, past the church, then take the third right and the street that you are looking for is the fourth one on the left; you can’t miss it. Right, those last few words “you can’t miss it” are the kiss of death; chances are that you will get lost before you are half-way there.

But suppose that the person you ask says: “Let me take you there.” In that case the person is the way to us, and we cannot miss it. That’s what Jesus does for us. He not only gives guidance and directions; He takes us by the hand and leads us; He strengthens and guides us personally each and every day. He does not tell you the way; He is the Way, the way to life.

A missionary in Africa tells how he was taking the gospel to a new tribe, far in the bush country. When he arrived at one village, his porters refused to go any farther because of the danger and uncertainty of what lay ahead. So, the missionary asked the local chief if there was someone who could act as his guide to the distant village. The chief summoned a man, tall, battle scarred, carrying a large axe. The next morning, they set off through the bush. As they went along, the way got increasingly rough and the path basically disappeared. So, the missionary stopped and asked his guide if he was sure he knew the way. The man said: “Do you see this axe in my hand? Do you see these scars on my body? With this axe I have blazed a path to the village to which you want to go; I came from there; I got these scars making the way. You ask me if I know the way. Before I came, there was no way, I am the way.”

Jesus came from glory; now He was on His way back to glory, by way of the cross. Before He came, there was no way. The scars of Calvary on His body attest to the price that He has paid to blaze that trail for you and me back to God. He points to His scars and says: "I am the Way." Later on, the disciples would understand this better, and hopefully so do we.

In this phrase, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," the key word is "way." While He walked among us, Jesus demonstrated truth and life; thus, these characteristics clearly show that He is the Way. An agnostic professor of comparative religion studies approached a convert from Hinduism to Christianity with the question: "Which of the teachings of Christ changed you?" To which, the new convert to Christianity replied: "None. It was Christ Himself who changed me."

So, what does Jesus mean when He says that "I am the Truth?" To recognize Jesus as the Truth is to affirm that the Word indeed did become flesh and lived among us as stated in the first chapter of John. Jesus by becoming one of us made the truth of God available to the world. Jesus shows us who God is; He reveals the true nature of God to us; one who is loving, forgiving and full of grace. One does not come to Jesus to ask about the truth; one comes to Him as the absolute truth. In Him alone we can see what God is really like, and He alone can lead us into God's presence. Jesus didn't just teach the truth, He lived it; and no other person has ever been able to do that.

In the closing scene from the movie *A Few Good Men*, Jack Nicholson's character shouts: "You can't handle the truth." Sometimes we don't want to know the truth. The truth that the only way to God and eternal life is through accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and living the life that He has called us to live. We figure that if we stay in the dark, we might just get a free pass to heaven, but it doesn't work that way.

Also, many of us don't want to know the truth because we are not currently living the way God wants us to. If we did know the truth then we might have to change how we live, our habits, what we do and who we associate with. And nobody likes change, except a wet baby. But then the question becomes "are we happy with our present life; I mean really happy or do we feel that something is missing and life could be better?" Well, Jesus says come to me and I will set you free and show you a better way to live.

Finally, Jesus says: "I am the Life." In the tenth chapter of John that we discussed a few weeks ago, Jesus said that He has come so that we might have an abundant life. Who wouldn't want an abundant life? However, many people today have confused the abundant life that Jesus promises with the affluent life. It does not take much wisdom to realize that the affluent life and the abundant life are not the same. Jesus is not promising us a life of prosperity, but He is promising us a life of joy, forgiveness, mercy, grace, purpose and love.

Nowhere in the Bible are we promised that life will be easy and comfortable, and that we will be materially rich. God does not always reward us by making life easy. He never promised us a rose garden, but He does promise that He will always be with us. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we are told that God will never let us down; He'll never let us be pushed beyond what we can stand; He'll always be there to help us come through whatever life throws our way. In Jesus we have a new life – a spiritual life, an eternal life and a life with God. This comes as we receive Him and permit Him to occupy the throne of our lives.

Life for many people today is a poor existence at best. It's going to work at a job they hate and seeking material possessions that they cannot afford, and which do not make them happy. Life for them has no meaning, no purpose, no joy, no assurance, and no satisfaction. We live in a country with one of the highest standards of living in the world; yet people are not happy. They seek meaning in drugs, alcohol, sex, technology and still those things do not satisfy them.

Jesus is the one who makes life complete. Until you come to know Him and give your life to Him, life at its best is but a fraction of its potential. It has been said that if you want the best potatoes go to Idaho. If you want the best cherries go to Michigan. If you want the best peaches go to Georgia. But if you want to find life, come to Jesus Christ. It is the only life that has meaning and satisfaction that lasts not just a lifetime, but forever. In the final analysis what most people are searching for is real life; life that is worth living.

I hope and pray that our discussions over the past few weeks on who Jesus Christ is have helped you grow closer to the Lord in your personal relationship. During this Holy Week, take time to reflect on who Jesus is to you, and what He went through for you and for me. The services on Thursday and Friday provide an opportunity for you to better understand what Jesus experienced during this week. Don't just jump from the "hosanna" of this morning to "He is risen" next Sunday; take time to reflect on how Jesus suffered for you. May each one of us, for the first time in our lives, truly appreciate the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, the love that God has for us, and the excitement of the Resurrection. Come find the way, discover the truth and live the life God offers you. Come and take the right road. Amen