

SUNDAY, MAY 10, 2020 SERMON

Easter 5A John 14:1-12, “The Life Giving Truth”

Dear fellow redeemed of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In our modern society, where absolute truth is rejected and fake news abounds, I have some news for you today that not only transcends personal opinion and time, but is absolutely true.

Religious sentiments, if one dares to state them publicly, run the gamut from: ***we all worship the same God, to you know God your way, and we know Him our way to: religions are equal; just different paths up the same mountain to Heaven.***

And so, in our morally ambiguous society, our Lord’s words carved into either side of our altar, **“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me,”** are rejected out of hand by most, even many Christians.

Our society has changed but, the message spoken through Paul and the other Christian missionaries was just as dynamic, just as controversial back in the day as it is today.

This message is threatening because the unified message of the church throughout the ages is that Jesus’ words are only one truth, He is the one path to life, and faith in Him is the one way to Heaven.

Additionally, if you claim to know the Father apart from His Son, then you do not know the Father at all for He and His father are One.

If you want to be saved from eternal damnation, there is only one way: through the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

For, **only He** is the way, the truth, and the life.

Only He is the Son of God who shows us the Father.

Only He is the One who conquered death in His resurrection. There is no other way. No other truth.

And that, brothers and sisters, is a message that threatens modern ears. Because it is exclusive. Theologians call these claims, “The Scandal of Particularity,” because it presents no options, no loopholes, no wiggle room.

You can only either receive it or reject it. You can either continue on your own way, or go His way. In effect, the words of our lesson challenge folks saying, **“So...what’s it gonna be?”**

And in response to that message, both things happened. ***Some believed in Jesus, others rejected Him. Some embraced Him as true Messiah, and others killed Him.***

Some believed Paul and the other apostles, and others persecuted them and killed them.

And today it is the same. Some will believe, and others will reject, and ridicule, and even seek to kill and silence the Christian Church and all who believe this message.

Furthermore, if you are Jesus' disciple, you too will suffer rejection, ridicule and ostracization by some people.

But this is not bad news! I ***know*** that's what you were thinking! We all do! Because none of us want to suffer!

None of us wants to be rejected. None of us wants people to think we are intolerant of others or appear narrow-minded.

We want to be liked, and we want the Church to be liked and to grow; we want people to join us and be saved.

The problem is that we sometimes think that we can achieve those goals ***by softening*** this threatening message. By being more open-minded. By not insisting on Jesus, and His truth, but slowly changing our ways, our thinking, and then our teaching.

And so today it has become fashionable to say that perhaps there is something to other religions. That they all have a kernel of truth that can perhaps save.

It's like we're saying, *hey, we still want you to join us!* For though we may not be ***the only way***, we have ***a better way*** . . .

What would Paul think of that? He'd tell us we are a bunch of God forsaking heretics. He'd say that a message like that is ***the real bad news***, because it certainly isn't the Good News!

It is bad news because such a kinder, gentler message ***will not and cannot save anyone***, though it does appeal to the comparison-shopping consumer in each of us!

But in reality, all it does is confirm us in our unbelief, or our misbelief, or our belief in ourselves.

The synagogues that Paul went to would have, in fact, welcomed such a message. As does the world today.

But Paul did not preach what they *wanted* to hear. And the Church today dare not preach what the world – or what we – *want* to hear! Because it will do no good.

Because ***if the message is not first threatening, then it cannot be saving.***

How so? Because, as Jesus taught, and as He showed, there must be death before there is resurrection. In order for there to be a new man, the old man in us must be killed.

Because the honest to God's truth is that the old, sinful Adam/Eve in each of us cannot be rehabilitated. He cannot be reformed, or whipped into shape. She does not want to change her ways. According to our sinful nature, ***we want our own way, and we reject those who tell us we can't have it!***

And you know this to be true! You know it because the old, sinful man in you wants his own way, and keeps trying to take control, to do those things we know we shouldn't do, and not do those things we know we should do.

But even more than that, that old man in each of us wants to be told he is good. We want approval.

We want to hear that our sin ***isn't so bad***, that we can believe what we want, and that God likes us just the way we are. We want to hear that *I'm okay*.

The thing is, ***that's exactly what God wants to tell you too!*** He ***wants*** to tell you that you're okay, and that you have His approval, but in order to do that, ***He must first show you that on your own, the way you are, you're not okay!***

He must first show you your sin, that you do not live up to His Holy, Holy, Holy standards, that by nature, you are not good.

And that's threatening, isn't it? Those are hard words to hear. And therefore some, perhaps many, will reject them.

But God loves you too much to soften that message. He thus kills our reliance on ourselves, and our abilities, and any goodness we think we might have.

Only then will **He raise us to a new life**. A new life built not on the cornerstone of our own efforts, merits, or good deeds, but on the true cornerstone, Christ crucified and raised for you.

For as Paul said, **it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead**. Necessary not ***for Him, but for us***.

It was necessary for him to suffer and rise in order to save us. To take away the sin that separates us from God. **And this Jesus**, Paul said, **whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ**.

The Christ crucified for our sins, and raised for our justification.

The Christ crucified, that through His death and resurrection back to life, we too might die and rise with Him to a new life.

The Christ crucified, who said from the cross, **Father forgive them**, that with that forgiveness of our sins, we would have the approval of the only One who matters: God's approval.

And in fact, in this Christ, this Messiah, He declares us good and right in His sight. That is the message Paul preached, and that Jesus spoke in the Holy Gospel that we heard, when He said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."** **PAUSE**

In our current context, there is much handwringing to be done as people worry about what life will be like after Covid. The worry about what will constitute "the new normal."

Lives have been lost, others altered irrevocably. Fortunes have been lost and even when the restrictions are lifted we may find that we can't even worship together as we once did.

Thank God then that, “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.**” Though our outward circumstances may have changed, God’s message doesn’t change.

Through the eyes of God given faith, we see that this “threatening” message, “**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life**” is, in fact, a saving message which transcends time, place and current circumstances.

For Jesus came not just to show us the way, but **to be the way** for us. He came not to tell us what **we want** to hear, but to tell us the truth.

And He came not so that we could live life comfortably now, but so that we might live forever.

He did that so that despite the sin and suffering and difficulties and struggles of this world, **our hearts might not be troubled.**

For when our hearts are troubled and condemn us, when the world seems to be winning, when we feel rejected and alone – there is a greater Word on which we can rely.

The Word of truth. The Word of our Father’s forgiveness. His Word – that even though we in no way deserve it – declares us good, by grace through faith, for Jesus sake.

That Word of forgiveness and life that we hear in Holy Baptism. That Word of forgiveness and life that we hear when sinners who’ve been declared saints like me, announce the Absolution in the stead and at the command of the Lord Jesus.

That Word of forgiveness and life that we hear at our Lord’s Supper. That Word that we can never hear enough, and so which is here for us every week, every day.

That Word which says that though we deserve death, our death has been taken care of by Christ. And now there is for us life. Life now, and life eternal.

That life cannot be found anywhere else, but only in the Word of God. The Word made flesh, and the Word now preached to us.

The Word that threatens and kills, but which also raises to life again. The Word which is calling all people to come and repent and receive His forgiveness. To come and eat and drink and receive His life.

To come and truly live, for **He is the way, the truth, and the life and there is no other. Amen.**