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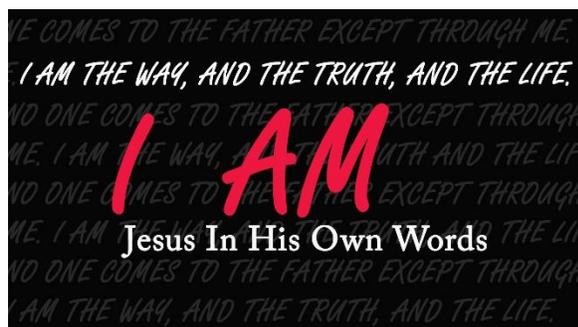
Title: Jesus In His Own Words: I AM Way, Truth and Life

Preaching: Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

Scripture: [John 14:1-7](#)

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Today, we continue our look at the seven statements of the identity of Jesus found in the Gospel of John. They are statements about his identity, in his own words. We call them the "I AM" statements of Jesus because each one begins with the words, "I AM...." We've considered 'I am the bread of life'; 'I am the light of the world'; 'I am the

gate'; 'I am the good shepherd'; 'I am the resurrection and the life'; Today is - 'I am the way, the truth and the life', and we'll finish out the series next week with, 'I am the vine'.

John's gospel takes the story of the people of God in the Old Testament and connects it to the story of Jesus in the New Testament, claiming that Jesus is the I AM. In the Old Testament, when Moses asked God for a name, God replied with the words "I AM." So, God has a name and that name is "I AM." I'll say it again, but Jesus does not just pick these statements at random. They make much more sense if you understand the context in which they were said. He said he was light in the middle of a ceremony of darkness. Last week, he said he was the resurrection in the middle of raising Lazarus from the dead. Whether it's current events or scripture, it is good to fully understand the context.

Scholars call chapters 13-17 of John the "farewell discourse" because Jesus is getting ready to leave them. He knows it even if those around him don't. Chapter 13 narrated the foot washing, the last meal shared between Jesus and his disciples, and the betrayal by Judas. Chapter 14 picks up with direct words from Jesus to his disciples about his impending departure. They are words of comfort and hope, promise and plain speech, and there's little mincing of words as to what's soon to take place.

Today's scripture begins and it's clear that Jesus has already looked at the map and knows the big picture but everyone else is just worried about what's around the next corner. Jesus knows what the future holds and says, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so,

would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." (John 14:2b-4).

I like maps. I like to know where I am and where I'm going. I still use paper maps. I always have an atlas in my backpack along with my laptop and other essentials. I buy a new atlas every year whether I need it or not – hey, a rural New Mexico road might have been rerouted last year and how else would I know without an updated atlas? While I do use GPS apps like Waze and Apple Maps on my phone and in my car, I'm much more comfortable spreading out a map or the atlas on the kitchen table and looking at a trip in its entirety. I like to see the big picture and not just the next mile or the next turn that's 600 feet away.

In our scripture, Thomas – yes, that same Thomas who we've dubbed Doubting Thomas – is more worried about the corner that's 600 feet ahead. He and Jesus are talking about two different things when they have their conversation about where Jesus is going and how Thomas can get there. In John, Thomas is sort of the Eeyore character from Winnie the Pooh – you know the stuffed donkey who is a little pessimistic and always asking the most basic of questions. They are the kind of questions that, when it comes to the question-and-answer session of a lecture and the presenter says there are no dumb questions, would seem like a dumb question but is the very question on everyone's mind. Thomas acts in character, taking the practical, realistic role, and asks a fair question.

On the heels of Jesus' grand address about dwelling places and vague travel plans, Thomas, in a voice that I imagine being somewhat weary but not yet despairing, cuts to the chase: "First of all, we have no idea what you're talking about, and second of all, upon what basis should we have known?" The actual scripture says this - "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:5) – but I can imagine Thomas having a little more attitude and frustration in his statement.

Thomas wants to know directions to these dwelling places – if you grew up with the King James Version of the Bible, you might remember them being called "mansions" – and Jesus works with him to assure him he doesn't need the kind of map or directions he's thinking about. It is amid Thomas wanting to get out the atlas and figure out where Jesus is talking about going that Jesus gives his sixth identity statement in his own words. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John 14:6).

If you put yourself in the shoes of the disciples, they've been through a whirlwind in the past week and there's a lot they are not understanding. The week started with what we call Palm Sunday and a triumphal entry into Jerusalem. From then on, Jesus has been talking to them about his death. He celebrates Passover with them, and he washes their feet and has a final meal with them. John mentions the meal but not the words of institution that we use at the table. By the time we get to today's I AM statement, Judas has betrayed him, and Peter has been identified as the one who will deny even knowing Jesus not just once but three times.

The disciples are groping around aimlessly for a path, a truth, a life, and THE path, truth, and life is staring them in the face and they can't see it. They are looking for seven habits, nine steps, ten commandments, or a spiral-bound AAA Triptic (that dates me) when the answer lies in the intimate relationship between Jesus and them. Insofar as Thomas has missed that point, he is judged. But judgment in John always comes as forward-looking, rather than focusing on the past.

Jesus calls Thomas into a future that is wholly dependent upon his relationship with Jesus and God. Jesus also stops Thomas from complaining about all the reasons he doesn't understand all of this. "This is hard; how are we supposed to know? We don't get it." Jesus doesn't settle for that but calls Thomas out- "I am it; surely you know me. When you know me, you know all you need to know."

In preparation for a presentation to the Elders meeting last week, I did some original source reading from one of the founders of the Restoration Movement - Alexander Campbell. Our congregation is a part of the restoration movement with Campbell and Barton Stone coming together to form the "Disciples of Christ" and the "Christian Church" pieces our movement. In the front of the 1837 manuscript of the Campbell / Purcell Debate is a letter from Alexander Campbell to his adversary in the debate, John B. Purcell, letting Purcell know that he had safely arrived in the debate city, Cincinnati.

Alexander Campbell had traveled from Bethany, West Virginia, in the panhandle just north of Wheeling, to Cincinnati. Google Maps and my trusty atlas tell me that is a trip of 247 miles with a travel time of 3 hours and 59 minutes. Here is the first paragraph of the letter dated January 11, 1837.

"Bishop Purcell, Respected Sir: At two o'clock this morning, after a tedious and perilous journey of ten days, I arrived safely in this city. The river having become innavigable in consequence of the ice, I was compelled to leave it and take to the woods, about two hundred miles above. By a zigzag

course which carried me to Chillicothe and Columbus, sometimes on foot, sometimes on a sleigh, and finally by the mail stage, I accomplished a land tour of two hundred and forty miles, equal the whole distance from Wheeling to Cincinnati." ¹

A couple of things strike me about this. First, I question his wisdom in making that trip in January, but I also admire his determination to get to where he was going by whatever means necessary. Our goal as Christians is to follow Jesus on the road that he is on to the destination where he is headed. Sometimes it's following Google Maps on the interstate that is free of traffic and construction and sometimes it's more like Alexander Campbell's slog through icy rivers, woods by foot, and sleigh in winter. But that road, Jesus has told us, will give us truth and life. Jesus said. I am the road. I am the way. We, who follow Jesus are on the road that is his. That is why we are here – we want to be better at staying on the road – on the way.

There is not a single shoe in this place that does not contain a foot of clay, a foot that drags, a foot that stumbles; but on just such feet we all seek to follow that road through a world where there are many other roads to follow. But not one of them has an end more known or more assured. "I am the way," he said, "the truth and the life."

There is a reason you've heard our scripture many times before. If you've been to a funeral, you've likely heard this passage. Why is that? It's because it's a passage of comfort. Do not let your heart be troubled, because there's a place for you in my Father's house. Do not let your heart be troubled, because Jesus prepared the place for you. He opened the way. He is the way. Do not let your heart be troubled, because Jesus himself is your dwelling place and he will come and take you to himself.

Do not let your heart be troubled, because Jesus and the Father are one, so that if have Jesus you have the Father. Do not let your heart be troubled, because Jesus has come in the Holy Spirit. He is with you now, and will be with you always, not as an observer, but a Helper. Jesus is teaching us that what we are to be concerned with is not this life, but with eternal life. The Scriptures speak often of the life to come after our life on this earth, and as we follow the voice of our shepherd, we can grasp what that eternal life is in the here and now. We can live this life in such a way that we are not chasing things that don't last but chasing the things that do last and have eternal significance. This type of life has an eternal impact not only for us but for untold others around us.

When Jesus refers to himself as the way, the truth, and the life, he is giving us a better way to live our lives through him. He is showing us that through

following him daily in faith, he will lead us to a better, richer, more meaningful life than we could ever find on our own. Those mansions – those dwelling places - are not places that your atlas or Google Maps or Waze will tell you how to get to. When you follow Jesus, you are there. “Dwelling place” properly interpreted, simply means in the presence of God. Where Jesus is, there we will be.

Notice in our scripture that Thomas never gets a chance to respond. However, he gets his shining moment later - after Easter - when the resurrected Jesus visits him. There he utters a full confession of Jesus’ identity: “My Lord and my God.” Thomas and those who are followers of Jesus now have a story to tell. Death and letting go are hard and truly, those left behind cannot imagine anything worthwhile coming out of loss. And yet, we have this promise from Jesus. “Where I am going, you can come too. I am the way, the truth, and the life. You won’t need directions. Just follow me.”

¹ Letter found on page A2 of book, A Debate on the Roman Catholic Religion: Held in the Sycamore Street Meeting House, Cincinnati from the 13th to the 21st of January, 1837. Between Alexander Campbell of Bethany, Virginia, and the Rt. Rev. John B. Purcell, Bishop of Cincinnati. Stereotyped & published by J.A. James & Co., Cincinnati, 1837.