

## 2023 05 07 – The Way, the Truth and the Life

**Scripture: Luke 14:1-14** (The Inclusive Bible)

Today, as we begin Asian Heritage Month, we are celebrating and reflecting on the contributions that Asian Canadians have made in our country, and more particularly, in our church. The [video](#) that we just watched was created as a way to honour the history of Asian people within The United Church of Canada. I invite us to keep their stories in our minds as we explore today's reading from the Gospel of John.

First we need to be aware of the context of this particular scripture passage. This conversation between Jesus and his disciples takes place in Bethany, six days before Passover. They are at the home of Mary and Martha. Martha is serving a banquet in Jesus' honour. This is, in fact, the Gospel of John's version of the Last Supper. But instead of the sharing of bread and wine, the focus in this version of the story is on Jesus' final words to his disciples.

In the previous chapter, Jesus has just informed his closest followers that he is leaving. He says,

“My little children, I won't be with you much longer.  
You'll look for me, but what I said to the Temple authorities, I say to you:  
where I am going, you cannot come.” (John 13:33)

His disciples were, of course, distressed by this news!

“Rabbi,” Peter said, “Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you!”

“Lay down your life for me?” exclaimed Jesus, “The truth of the matter is, before the cock crows you’ll have disowned me three times!” (John 13:37-38)

Imagine the fear and the uncertainty that was building in the minds of the disciples. They all knew that Jesus’ life was in danger. Was this Jesus’ way of telling them that he was going to die at the hands of his enemies? What would they do without him? How would they cope without their leader? Who would they follow?

Jesus, no doubt, could feel the tension in the room. The next words that he spoke, the words from today’s scripture reading, were designed to comfort his confused and frightened followers. These are the same reassuring words that I use when standing with grieving families at a graveside. Jesus said,

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled.  
You have faith in God; have faith in me as well.  
In God’s house there are many dwelling places;  
otherwise, how could I have told you  
that I was going to prepare a place for you?  
I am indeed going to prepare a place for you,  
and then I will come back to take you with me,  
that where I am, there you may be as well.  
You know the way that leads to where I am going.”

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled.” It gives me some solace that even when Jesus said these words, his disciples still had questions and concerns. It was Thomas who spoke up and said,

“But we don’t know where you’re going.  
How can we know the way?”

Next comes one of the most famous and most controversial quotes in the New Testament. Jesus told him,

“I myself am the Way—  
I am Truth,  
and I am Life.  
No one comes to Abba God  
but through me.”

Now, as we all know, this line has been used for centuries as a way to exclude. Many have distorted Jesus words to mean: “If you’re not Christian, you’re damned. The only way to heaven is through belief in me.” But it is important to remember that when Jesus says these words, he is not in the middle of a lecture about who will get to heaven. Jesus is providing pastoral care to his closest followers. He is letting his disciples know that when he leaves, they will in fact still be able to connect with him, but on an even deeper level. He’s saying, “Don’t worry. Just stay on the path, and we’ll be together! No one can walk the path to Abba God without encountering me!”

No one can walk the path to God without encountering Jesus! Why is this true? Because the path to God is the way of Love. And Jesus, the Risen Christ, is the Way, is Love itself. This is what Jesus has been teaching his disciples, through his words and actions, for years. In the previous chapter, right after telling them he was leaving, Jesus also said,

I give you a new commandment:  
Love one another.  
And you're to love one another  
the way I have loved you.

If you are following Jesus' way, his truth, his life, then you are following the Way of Love. And on that path of Love you will find the God of Love, you will find the Spirit of Justice, you will find the Prince of Peace and you will know that you are not alone. This is what Jesus is telling his disciples, this is what Jesus is telling us. This path is, of course, an inward journey, an inward journey to God that eventually leads to outward expressions of love and peace and justice..

Thich Nhất Hạnh, a famous Vietnamese Buddhist monk, peace activist, author, poet and teacher, once wrote:

When Jesus said, "I am the way," He meant that to have a true relationship with God, you must practice His way."

This Buddhist monk, was not suggesting that everyone turn to Christianity, but he was acknowledging that Jesus' life and teachings exemplified his own Buddhist understanding of what it meant to be on a path to the God of Love. Thich Nhat Hanh knew that people could find God through different cultures and different religions, but that all those different paths were based on the same truth. The truth of Love which leads to justice and peace.

I couldn't preach today without mentioning the coronation of King Charles III which took place in the early hours of yesterday morning. No, I didn't get up to watch it, but I did take a couple of hours on a rainy Saturday afternoon to view the beauty and the pageantry of the service itself. One of the things that I admired most about the service was the new king's attempt to include a variety of Christian denominations in the service and even to receive a greeting at the end from other faith communities including: Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and Buddhist.

As we celebrate Asian Heritage Month, may we remember the pain that racism and exclusionary practices have brought to this world. The kind of pain that many of our Asian brothers and sisters have felt in their countries of origin and here in Canada, their country of choice. May we, as we walk the Way of Love, work to eliminate all forms of exclusion and religious persecution in our church, in our community and in our world

At the same time, may we celebrate the wonderful diversity that God has created on this earth. May we celebrate the cultural heritage of our Asian brothers and sisters. May we celebrate the wonderful gifts that they bring to this country and to The United Church of Canada. May we celebrate the Asian people who are a part our own congregation. Today especially, as we follow the Way of Jesus, may we celebrate the gift of music that Jackie Orola Ravino and Harold Lapuz will now share with us. May it be so. Amen.