

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14:1-7

A woman was driving home one night. The weather was really nasty. Rain was coming down in buckets and visibility was very poor. All she could see were the taillights of the car in front of her, Since the car seemed to be going in the right direction she decided to stick with following it as close as possible. All of a sudden the car in front of her came to a stop. She began to wonder what had happened; perhaps the car had hit a deer or something like that. She began to feel uncomfortable; thinking being stopped in the middle of the road can often lead to accidents. Much to her alarm the car in front of her turned off their lights. Her concern was now growing as well as her anger, and she was then startled by a knocking on her window. She looked up and there was a man standing in the pouring rain wanting to speak to her. She cracked the window open and asked the man what the problem was. The man replied by stating that was what he was about to ask her. She stated that she wasn't the one who had stopped in the middle of the road and then turned off the car lights. The man's reply was that they were not in the middle of the road, but they were in his driveway Obviously, this woman had chosen the wrong leader to follow. She had chosen a leader who would not take her to where she wanted and needed to go. She had chosen the wrong leader and the wrong road.

The Lenten season is all about following a leader, it's about going down a road that asks us to follow Jesus. We hear Jesus say: "Take up your cross and follow me." The Lenten season is a journey...it was a journey Jesus took as he set his focus toward Jerusalem and followed a road that eventually led to a cross on Golgotha. It was a path he took to accomplish his divine mission. How tempting it would have been to veer off that path and try and find another way. In the Garden of Gethsemene, we hear Jesus wrestling with that very thought. God, if it be possible, take this cup from me...but he remained steadfast to his mission, he followed the path that led to the cross. We picture him making his way as he enters Jerusalem...we call it the triumphal entry. It seemed like everyone had come out to praise Jesus. Children singing, people waving palm branches. The crowd is shouting: "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna to the son of David!" Jesus is carving out a way, a way that leads through the city, that leads

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

through the crowds. But how many would really understand? How many would be willing to follow this way. How quickly the tide changes.

You don't live at the seashore very long before you learn about the ways of the ocean and particular attention is paid to the tides. Before we lived in Sea Isle City, we paid little attention to things like Northeast winds, and full moons, and high tides. But when you live within a block or two of the ocean you become acutely aware of the mighty power of the ocean and you learn about the devastation a high tide can bring. More than once we saw the damage very high tides could do to beach front homes or cars on low-lying streets. Of course while living there, we heard stories about the great Nor'Easter of 1962. A storm that parked itself for 3 days along the east coast and each high tide brought higher water and more and more damage to the coastline. When it was over Sea Isle City had lost a whole block of homes in that storm.

It is quite a fascinating phenomenon – the changing tide. How it comes in and goes out right on schedule. How it is influenced by the phases of the moon and it is impacted by the direction of the winds. As people, we can be like that. There is the changing tide of public opinion. It's amazing how our views can change, how attitudes on a certain subject can go from one point of view to another. We see it all the time when a presidential poll is taken on how people feel about how the president is doing. The rating can be quite high one month, and then because of crisis in the world, or bad economic news, the rating can plummet. People's opinions can easily change. At one moment you can be riding high and the next you're down at the bottom.

There is a story about a politician who had a great crowd that had gathered to hear him speak and one of his friends said: "You must get a great thrill to know this kind of a crowd came out, just to hear you speak." To which the politician replied: "Yes, I am thrilled, but I always remind myself, how much larger the crowd would be if I were being hanged."

Today is Palm Sunday. What a great crowd of people had gathered to see Jesus. Hundreds of people, lining the streets, in this triumphant procession. People clamoring to see the Miracle-Worker. Many had heard about Lazarus,

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

how Jesus had raised him from the dead. Public opinion was running very high. And so they shout to Jesus: "Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." What a glorious sight. The Pharisees exclaim with dismay: "Look, how the whole world has gone after him." I suppose Jesus could have basked in these moments of public sentiment. Surely the temptation was there to establish his kingship. That's what the people wanted. But Jesus had no false illusions about the attitudes of the crowd. He could see beyond their shouts of Hosanna, their surface praise. Some who perhaps were caught up in the frenzy. Some who would follow him as long as he performed another miracle for them. Jesus could see the crowds, the palm branches waving, the people shouting. But Jesus could also see how the tide would change. How the mood of this mob of people could be easily swayed, the shouts of hosanna, would soon be replaced with cries of "Crucify him, crucify him."

Jesus mission was not to gain popularity, but it was to follow a different way, to follow God's will. The object of his mission, to die for a lost people. Jesus understood his mission and it would lead him to a cross. It was a mission described in today's "I Am" saying. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Words that Jesus gave to his disciples in this journey of Holy Week to prepare his disciples for his death. Words to comfort them, words to remind them of the purpose of his coming. Words that we often read at funerals because they speak of the way God has provided for you and me to know life and to know eternal life. Jesus says: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And you and I are called to become people of the Way. People of the Way - That's what they called the early Christians. It is discovering and learning what it means to follow Jesus, to live the things he taught us, to travel the path he travelled. People of the Way.

I was thinking how difficult that must have been for those disciples of Jesus, having spent those 3 years in close relationship with their Master and teacher, and now to see it all coming to an end. There's no way they could fully grasp all that was about to happen. But Jesus wants to comfort and assure them: Don't let your hearts be troubled or afraid. I am going ahead of you...I am preparing the way for you...so that where I am you may be also. The one who says: I am

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

the Way, was showing the way for his disciples, showing the way for you and me. Showing the way, how to live, how to connect to God, how to live as a disciple in this world. But like the crowds in Jesus' day, we can be easily swayed. We can lose sight of our mission. Jesus is looking for us to follow the Way, disciples who count the cost. Followers who will offer our praise and shout "Hosanna" and disciples who will still be loyal and faithful when the world says: "Crucify him".

I am the Way, the Truth, and the life – to follow the way is a real test of our faith...to see how deep, our strong our commitment is, to follow Christ even when the way gets rough. Even when there's a Calvary in front of us. I guess that's why Jesus challenged his followers to take up their cross daily and follow him. He knew it would not always be an easy road. The road to the cross is filled with changing tides. Times when you may see the miracles of God at work around you or in your life and you can't help but shout Hosanna. But also times when you are filled with questions; times when you wonder – Where is God? What are you trying to say to me, God? Times when you feel the support and fellowship of Christian brothers and sisters, people who can be such a support and encouragement to us and those times when you may feel all alone. Jesus is seeking those disciples who follow Him at high tide and low tide, in moments of joy and exhilaration and during periods of trial and despair.

Crowds can be fickle, the world around us can impact our moods. But more important is our connection to the Great I Am. Like Hey Young's sermon last week on staying connected to the vine. To know where our source of strength comes from. To keep that relationship with Christ alive, by abiding in him, staying connected. That we discover how Jesus wants us to live. Not just talking about it, but living it. That's following His path. We offer our willingness to serve him, to follow the Way, no matter what. On the mountaintop and in the valley. In Jerusalem as well as Calvary. Jesus has prepared the way for us.

I cannot forget the experience I had in one of the churches I served where there was a young man who had declared to me that he was an agnostic. Wasn't sure if there was a God, and certainly expressed no interest in being part

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

of the church. He was a very bright individual, but he had a hard time believing and understanding this whole matter of having faith. But during our ministry there I, along with other members of that church had the opportunity to share our faith with him. After several years, we heard the wonderful news, Don had become a Christian. Don had given his heart to the Lord. This man, along with his wife and 2 small children began attending worship regularly. A few years later, after we were in another church appointment, we heard the devastating news that Don was dying with a terminal illness. It was such a blow to this family and to the church. It wasn't long before we received the news that Don had passed away. It was such a difficult thing for all of us to make sense out of. But as hard as all of this was to understand, I started hearing tremendous reports about Don's faith that I hadn't been able to witness now that we were in another church. Don had become a very powerful witness for Jesus Christ. And even in the last months of his life he would actively and unashamedly testify of God's grace and salvation. He shared his personal witness and experience with all who visited him. People were deeply affected by his testimony.

One day I was talking with the lay leader of that church, he was telling me how quickly Don had moved along in his Christian walk. And you know the interesting thing he said to me? He said: "It was so great to see the change in the tide from our discipling Don to his discipling us. That Don had come to understand the significance of what it meant to be a follower of the Way. And then leading others to also find that way.

That's the challenge for all of us...on this Palm Sunday. To be more than people who sing our praises, more than Christians who shout our Hosannas. We are challenged to be people who are willing to follow Christ, follow his way, his way of discipleship, his way of serving others. That we would yield ourselves more fully to Jesus. To practice a life of faith, even as the world would try to lead us down a different road. The road to the cross will have its Hosanna moments, but it is also a road of sacrifice. Jesus calls you to travel that road. But do not be troubled. Do not be afraid. Jesus has already travelled that road and prepared the way for you and me.

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life