

*Going my way?* A sermon preached on January 3, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: ISAIAH 40:1-5  
ACTS 4:1-12  
JOHN 13:36-14:7

When we were first married, we did not live all that far from Toronto.

Often on a Sunday afternoon, after both of us had either lead or assisted at 3 morning services in three different churches,

We would drive to the city in time for the evening service at Yorkminster Park Baptist Church.

At that time, its minister, John Gladstone, was said to be the best preacher in the city – in retrospect, I firmly believe this.

And its music under Catherine Palmer and the choir was always inspiring and uplifting.

Best of all, neither Katharine nor I had to worry about little details.

We could fully participate in the worship from a different perspective.

After a number of visits on a Sunday evening, we realized we were not the only clergy to be in attendance.

In fact, on more than one occasion. Dr. Gladstone acknowledged this to be the case and he was humbled by the presence all clergy – and meant it!

He was a great story teller and his preaching style was calm and deliberate, thorough and always anchored in scripture. During one particular sermon, he reminded us all – particularly clergy – that our main work as leaders and followers of Jesus was to lift up Jesus – so that all might in time be drawn to him. The phrase is from John 12:32. Make Jesus attractive and winsome said Dr. Gladstone.

For me, it was one of those life aha moments. It is what I have endeavoured to do now for over 35 years of parish ministry – lift up Jesus-so that all may be drawn to him. To be like a John the Baptist – “Jesus must increase, but I must decrease.”

One of the best ways to lift up Jesus is to continue to highlight stories of his life and times, The people he touched, What he did and said. How he dealt with life’s good and not so good times.

For the next few weeks then, I want us to specifically look at who Jesus himself claimed to be.

The “I AM’s of the New Testament – found exclusively in John’s Gospel

You remember some of them – **I am the light of**

**the world; I am the bread of life**

**I am the true vine**

**Before Abraham was, I am**

**I am the good shepherd**

A couple of general reminders about the I AM’s

First none were spoken in the context of some sort of removed, academic context.

They are not given as case studies in isolation.

Rather, the I am’s were spoken to real people – just like you and me

Another general reminder – the I AM’s were then and are still today are spoken by Jesus to raise our awareness and heart knowledge of him

To help us to understand how deep the love of God is for each of us

In other words, to help us *refocus our attention and our hearts on Jesus – not only for this time and this place, but throughout each day of the week.*

This morning, **I am the way, the truth and the life....**

The section Paul read moments ago is part of a large section in John's Gospel known as the 'Last discourse'

There are a lot of things happening  
Lots of promises by Jesus  
A heightened stress and anxiety level from the disciples.

It is clear that the time for Jesus to leave the disciples is now imminent.

Naturally they are afraid, for Jesus has been their rock as well as their defense in the face of attacks by the religious leaders and others.

Even though Jesus has spoken of his leaving to the disciples and has made similar claims before, the disciples are particularly obtuse (a point that Mark's Gospel loves to highlight!)

The disciples hear Jesus' command about love (vs.34-35) which ought to deserve more attention –

Yet they are obsessed with questions Jesus either cannot or will not answer right now – where are you going?

Jesus promises that there will be a place for them,

That he will come again and so that where He is, the disciples will be also.

Thomas blurts out what probably more than one of them is thinking about.

**Lord, we do not know where you are going, how  
can be know the way?(vs.5)**

Thomas, the doubter, the perennial wet blanket of the group – the one who is so locked onto what is there, that he cannot see, nor hear the possibilities open in the Lord's company.

Thomas – one who has clearly seen the Lord do great things, but is solely focused on the immediate.

Jesus' reply to Thomas is not a rebuke or a put down.

It is a reply that is gentleness, encouragement and hope itself.

**I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. (vs.6)**

Touch point for us?

If Jesus was so patient, forgiving, long suffering and enduringly graceful with often very obtuse disciples who were with him for three years,  
*Can we not believe that same patience, forgiveness, grace filled long suffering is still part of getting to know Jesus better?*

*Can we not lift up Jesus to others because we ourselves have been deeply and profoundly touched in our own lives by this same patient, forgiving, grace filled, long suffering Jesus.*

The evidence from the followers of Jesus for over 2000 years, highlights that nothing has changed with Jesus' promises or the way that through the Spirit of God, he touches people

Like all of the I AM's, I see this to be an important way Jesus continues to reach out to us  
Saying to us in this case-THIS IS WHO I AM—  
THE WAY,--THE DIRECTION.

I am the TRUTH— that which is not changeable or alterable by mood swings or circumstances  
True Truth as the late Francis Schaeffer used to say— that which is true to all people and for all time.

And Jesus does this not in a belligerent, I talk/you listen way.

It is always by invitation— **come, follow me, Come unto me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.**

*Always in the Christian life it is deciding how to respond to the God who in Jesus has already responded to us.*

Another touch point or reminder to us from this I AM— *is simply that he is the way, the truth and the life*

Not one way among many

Not the way of a certain day, season or time.

THE WAY

Many remain critical of Christianity for this particular reason – for they see the way of Jesus being too exclusive and dismissive of all other ways to God.

And that just does not blend well or fit into the very pluralistic and syncretistic world in which we all live.

This I AM does not call us to Bible bash or spiritually bludgeon.

Nor does it call us as followers of Jesus to preach some sort of holy crusade against those faiths that are not Christian.

What I do believe it does is to remind us that if we are going to follow the ways and teachings of Jesus,

Make them the foundation of our lives,  
Then we need to apply this I AM to the whole of our lives – not Sunday morning.

We need to understand what demands, obligations and responsibilities are ours as followers of Jesus.

We need to get a grip on our life and stop drifting....

For any old way, any old goal, any old purpose, any old destination will no longer do!!!

As human beings we are not hard wired for drift – we will follow someone – Jesus' IAM this morning is a call and a challenge – make real sure

you are following that which will give you  
 purpose, life, meaning, hope  
 Get you through the down and not so good times.  
 Jesus says:

**I AM THE WAY; THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE**  
**will** do just that – and so much more....

For in Christ, we do have new life as a gift from  
 God

In Christ alone is forgiveness of sins and joy and  
 peace

Righteousness with God comes only by believing  
 in Christ. We can never be right with God by our  
 actions – however noble and good they are.

In Christ alone is our salvation by God.

So intense were these beliefs held at the  
 time of Jesus and in successive generations since  
 that Christians are still prepared to die, rather  
 than recant. And that fact that there were more  
 Christian martyrs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all  
 the other centuries combined is evidence of the  
 depth and commitment to the risen Christ.

By the way, I do not believe this morning's  
 I AM is an automatic call to martyrdom --at least  
 not in this country – though to be honest to  
 practice this I AM may cause us to be laughed at  
 or dismissed as unrealistic or just plain silly and  
 out of touch with life in the here and now

You may even be called or branded as the “religious sort” – never fun to be around, always judging others, never enjoying a joke, being uber serious about all things.

Sadly, some followers of Jesus are just like this.

Mercifully most of the people I meet and speak with are anything but:

They do take life and its living out day by day very seriously – they know life is difficult.

But they laugh – at themselves as much as in other situations.

And they are not drowning in despair, but retain a sense of hope, a sense of possibility, even in the seemingly impossible situations in which they find themselves or are exposed to...

Why? Because they have learned they can trust in the Lord Jesus.

They know Jesus is real – He is a person--not some doctrine, set of rules or regulations.

They know him to be among other things THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

They know this is not illusion or empty talk.

How about each of you?

Do you know and live as if Jesus is **the way, the truth and the life?**

Well, do you?