

“Jesus As the Way”

Isaiah 53:1-6; John 14:6

January 19, 2020

Those early days of marriage can be wonderful, can't they? You're learning more and more about the person you're going to spend your whole life with. Yes, there are joys in those first few months of marriage. But there are also, if we're honest, some frustrations, too. Because while you're learning about the many wonderful facets of your spouse, you're also learning more about their deficiencies.

Natalie no doubt learned one of mine on the way to the beach early on in our marriage. Now this was the days before GPS systems and so to get somewhere you'd never been before you'd create a list of instructions on how to get here. Turn right at so and so and left when you get to here. You know how it works. Well, on this voyage, I'd gotten mixed up along the way so we decided to stop and ask for help. We pulled over at a convenience store and thankfully, the person we inquired of knew exactly where we were going. That woman gave us detailed instructions on just how to get to where we were going.

So off we pulled onto a South Carolina highway. When we got to the first place we were supposed to turn, I asked Natalie, “Which way do we go now?”

She said something like, “*Jason, you heard the instructions, didn't you?*”

It was then and there she learned something about me.

I have a terrible mind for instructions.

Tell me to do things in a certain order and I'm sure to get them jumbled, confused or forget them all together. It is for that reason that in this verse we're about to read, I'm grateful the word “instruction” doesn't come up at all. Hear now the Word of our Lord from the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John. “Jesus said to him, **“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except by me.”**”

This is the Word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God.

This week I'm beginning what'll be a three-week sermon series on this particular verse because it opens a window in which we can learn much about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, since I'm a Christian pastor, I really don't think there's a much better topic for sermons than Him. Honestly, it's my hope that I never preach a sermon that doesn't have Jesus front-and-center.

I need Jesus and I think you do, too.

And then I look out at this world and man, does it need Jesus.

Because as I talk to people, more and more, I see a multiplying magnitude of folks who're lost. The national statistics bear this out. Right now, we're seeing rates of depression, anxiety and suicide rise at an alarming rate. We simply can't read the news and escape the fact that being lost has reached nearly epidemic proportions.

Perhaps it does indeed take one to know one, truthfully, for I wandered lost for the better part of a decade and have had the occasional bout of it even as a pastor. And what I see is an ocean of people out there, just trying to figure out how, and perhaps even why, to make it through another day. The numbers don't lie.

And I can't help but remember a time early on when a young woman came to speak to me as I was in the first couple of months of being a pastor. She confessed that she was lost and told me she needed some guidance. So I gave her some of the typical off-the-rack pastor instructions – come to church, read your Bible, pray. All good things, mind you but it's funny that, for someone who's terrible at instructions I seemed to have no problem doling them out, right?

But what I'm learning is that when you're feeling lost, confused by the world and by which way to go with your life, a set of instructions isn't always the most helpful thing.

You see, at the end of the day, *we all need a means by which to navigate our lives when the checklists fail. We all, every one of us, need a method to chart a course back into the full light and warmth of home, the place where Jesus is.*

So, thank God Jesus declares himself, not a set of instructions, not a to-do-list or a checklist. Jesus declares that, as the Son of the Father, he is the WAY.

The way isn't so much necessary steps to take as it is towering mountains of Christ by which to navigate when your soul clunks to the floor and you find yourself frustrated and empty.

I see now, only in retrospect that I did that young woman a disservice. I know that because several months thereafter I ran into her at the grocery store. She told me she was checking out Wicca now as Christianity didn't "work" for her.

I had a hand in that. I handed her a Checklist, but didn't take the time to show her the Way of Jesus.

So then, what is the Way of Jesus and how to we navigate by it when we find ourselves lost?

I'm finding the best way to navigate life on this side of eternity is using what sailors call a three-point fix. As I understand it, a three-point fix is using three known, visible markers as a means to not only locate yourself by triangulation but then to chart where you want to go. I did this just the other day in Belmont when an accident shut down the road I was on. I could see three landmarks so I turned left and right keeping those points in view. Next thing you know, I'd done the unimaginable. I'd navigated well!

Thankfully, the life of Jesus fixes our three points for life very well and they are towering, almost impossible to miss.

The more and more I read the Gospels, the more I see three defining traits of Jesus Christ come bubbling to the surface. They are humility, love and self-sacrifice. Humility, love and self-sacrifice. .

And hear me well – With these three known points of reference you can find where you are and chart your way back to joy by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now to say Jesus was humble is an understatement of cosmic proportion, isn't it?

To begin with, we've got to remember that Jesus CHOSE to become human in the first place? Can you imagine that? The freedom he would've had? Unanchored to anything except Father and Spirit, Jesus could do anything, yet he chose to take flesh, take on limitations that were not inherently his to take on. Thus the Incarnation itself is an act of cosmic humility.

But that's all God stuff. What about his entrance here on Earth? I mean, he could've chosen to be the Son of an Earthly King, right? Nope. He didn't. Could've made sure his arrival was heralded by a spectacular angelic parade visible for all to see with cherubim and seraphim exploding trumpets of Joy to the World. Nope, not so much. Aside to a very select few, Jesus's arrival went unannounced.

How Jesus arrived on earth shows us much of his humility. I mean, this is God, ya'll and where does he arrive? In a barn, laying in a feeding pen. Doesn't get much more humble than that, does it?

But then, Jesus lived his earthly live in a manner congruent with his entry.

I read to you now from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 3, verses 13-15.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.'

Jesus, who the Bible teaches us, lived without sin, comes and takes a baptism for the repentance of something he never once intersects with. That, my friends, is humility.

Then, hear this. In the Gospel of John, just before the Passover which would see him killed, Jesus Christ

"He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

Imagine that – God takes the time to wash our feet.

Again, what we see is that God Incarnate Choses NOT to relish his status but instead treat others, even the ones who deserve worse, better than he himself would be treated by the World. The Lord of Heaven and Earth washes his followers' feet.

The most remarkable Christians I meet are all quite humble. Have you ever noticed that? The ones pulling lots of weight, the ones really helping people in the world, they don't want to talk about them, they want to talk about others. That's humility. Paul puts it this way in Philippians – "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

That's a recipe for humility y'all. One founded entirely upon Christ's example. So I wonder, how much of our lives presently are anchored to humility? Do we really think more highly than others or are we letting pride and selfish ambition direct our course?

Now let me dispel a potential myth for you. Just coming to church does not automatically make one humble. I've met some terribly self-aggrandizing people in the pews. Been one myself, I confess it. But we're not alone.

We get this great story in the 10th chapter of the Gospel of Mark. Here are these people who've been with Jesus in his earthy ministry. Who've seen his humility and his willingness to do for others. But what's their big concern? Well James and John come up and ask Jesus to do something for them. They want him to let them sit at his right hand and his left hand when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus, after all, is showing them and telling them about humility and then James and John come to Jesus with a request. Now look, they've seen some truly miraculous stuff, all to help other people. Healings, feedings, that type of stuff. So what do these two brothers ask Jesus to do?

Seat them at his right and left hand in his coming Kingdom.

How did they miss his humility?

How do we?

Sometimes just being in the church makes one begin to think more highly of themselves than they should. I've done that. But as soon as we start believing we're better than someone, anyone else, we miss a central message of the Bible. *We're all sinners in need of God's Amazing Grace.* Pride though has a way of climbing into our beds and telling us, well, we're special, more special than the people around us.

It's not true.

And what I've found is that the Christians I want to be like, aren't like that at all. It's been my blessing to have men numerous men and women in the church who are humble servants of the Lord. One man, Jim comes to mind. Jim is a brilliant chemist. In fact, he created an agent which first allowed scientists to separate strands of DNA. He's like a super-genius, y'all.

But you wouldn't know if from talking to him.

He comes across as a soft-spoken guy with a huge heart. In fact, when Jim heard that my son Benjamin needed some help with his Pinewood derby car, he invited us over to his house. He spent hours of his time with Ben and I showing us just what to do (and doing a lot of it for us, really.). Then he asks us, can he fix us a sandwich or anything. A brilliant chemist with tons of accolades and money but you wouldn't know it because he'd rather help people than boast of his successes.

So, let's call humility landmark # 1 for our three-point fix.

The second, of course, is that Jesus showed us the nature of love.

Look, we're so blessed to have three cats. Just the other day, Natalie was feeling under the weather when I got home and, literally, around and on top of her are all three of these cats.

Well, at first, I was a little jealous, to be honest. I'd been sick a few days prior and there was not such an outpouring of cat-concern for me!

But then I remembered something, Natalie is the one who feeds them, takes care of their litter box, cares for them when they're sick and plays with them as she's able. Me, I just pet them, really.

I say I love those cats but my love for them is more of a feeling which comes and goes. Natalie though, man, she loves those pets and she makes it know through her actions on their behalf.

Jesus did that as well. He didn't just say he loved His people. He took action on their behalf. In fact, when we really look in the Bible what we'll see is that love is used as a verb almost exclusively.

And throughout his Earthly ministry, Jesus is constantly demonstrating his love. He feeds five thousand people. He heals countless numbers of others, He teaches a Samaritan woman how to find living water. He resurrects Lazarus. In fact, one time, Jesus was at a wedding party when the booze ran out. In his love for the guests, he turned water into wine so the celebration might continue.

Jesus taught us directly about the centrality of acts of love.

"A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves."

Perhaps even more briefly, Jesus puts it this way in the Gospel of John – "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

As we humbly love others with our actions and not just our words, our lives will change.

During periods of spiritual lost-ness or struggle, there is nothing so effective in our spiritual growth and development than of being of maximum service to others. Again, I think that's core Christianity. Instead of thinking about yourself, think about others and take action on their behalf..

And you know what? Those acts of love we undertake for others? Study after study shows that they, make us feel better! And it makes sense when you consider, we who are created in the Image of God find our fullest expression living as Godly a life as possible. If then Jesus, the very Son of God came to serve humanity by bridging the sin-gap which existed between the Father and us, then it stands to reason our great joy would be found doing likewise.

I know a man who learned that lesson later in life. One of my friend's fathers was a pretty querulous man as we were growing up. Fixated on earning more money and living more comfortably, he was frequently in a foul mood and almost always at odds with everyone, including his wife and children. He was pretty miserable. He was lost.

I ran into him again about a decade ago, nearly 15 years since I'd last seen him. I could see a real, physical change in him, no kidding. In fact, being older, he actually looked far younger. There was a real gleam in his eyes. That gleam got brighter as he began talking about his passion. Helping Haitian kids. Turns out, he'd begun volunteering with a church's ministry team doing mission to Haiti. Now, he was, according to his own words, "more alive than he'd ever been." In fact, we spent a great deal of our time chatting talking about a particular family that he'd taken on as, well, family. He spoke of them and boasted about them just as he did my friend and his siblings. Not once did he mention money or possessions, two topics that were sure to have come up with him in the past.

That man was on the Way of Jesus, no doubt about it. He'd found his way to where Jesus was through his ongoing acts of love to neighbors all over the world.

So, call Acts of Love for others Landmark # 2 in finding our way back to the Way of Jesus when we're lost.

The third, of course, is the one that perhaps towers above them all. I read to you now from the Gospel of John – "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

The Way of Jesus is then, most clearly, the path of self-sacrifice.

We live in a culture right now that is really quite self-aggrandizing. We're told, time after time, that we deserve the best. That the greatest thing in life is to live most comfortably and have the best experiences life can offer. Then we can put up boastful pictures on social media saying, "look at me!"

But the Way of Jesus is the Way of the Cross.

Jesus, an innocent man, both of the charges he was condemned for as well as guiltless with respect to sin, DIED for us and for our salvation. There simply was no length Jesus would not traverse in order to gather all the sheep of his pasture.

And it isn't the case that Jesus came only to save the quote-unquote "good" people. He didn't give up his life to redeem folks who'd never know the darkness of sin or what it meant to be lost in this world. Hear these words from Romans 5 – "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"

Friends, believe the good news of the Gospel! In Jesus Christ, everything you've ever done that was just flat-out wrong has already been forgiven in Him. Jesus, the Way, the One who knows you completely, even more than you know yourself looked upon what was to be of you, before the foundations of the earth and said, "YES." The world needs this John or Joan or whoever you are.

You have been created and fashioned, loved before there was even such a thing as time by the one who squeezed his divinity into our humanity, assuming both roles, Son of God, Son of man, foretold in the Old Testament. He became our Suffering Servant and by His Stripes you have (past tense friends) you have been HEALED.

And that healing? It was costly. Self-sacrificial. Jesus suffered and died on a Cross at Calvary. He gave up the freedom of pure divinity, eternally anchored now to flesh and then allowed that body to be mocked, beaten, stripped, spit on and crucified. Why?

Because He loves you, that's why. And he was willing to empty Himself so that you could be filled.

And, if you claim him as your Shepherd. If you strive to be on Jesus' Way, then front-and-center will be self-sacrifice. Sure, it sounds scary for we fear what we haven't fully experienced. In this Western World where we can so easily find satiety of the flesh in some many wonderful and terrible ways at the click of a button almost, the blessings of self-sacrifices seem hard to fathom.

But if we were truly created in the image of God as Genesis tells us we were, then we were created too in the image of Jesus who shows us by his self-sacrifice the very meaning of life. And it isn't in the gratification of the flesh. It isn't getting the best for yourself and your family. It isn't creating "bucket lists". It is instead encountered in this fashion Jesus Himself teaches us: And he said to all, "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life^[g] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

I was fortunate to have met a man, years ago by the name of Paul. A humble man, a servant of the Lord. Paul had a heart for other people bigger than most. Once, on a mission trip to West Virginia, he realized that there were tons of kids that were sitting around with nothing to do. He figured what they needed were bikes. So for the next year, Paul went to the recycling center nearly every day to try and find bikes people had thrown away. He'd find one, usually in great disrepair and he'd nurse it back into full health. By the time the next mission trip rolled around, Paul had lovingly restored about 10 bicycles. I know he was looking forward to giving them to those children. All that hard work and effort rewarded by the loving thanks of kids.

But you know what?

There was a woman on the trip who was struggling to find something to do. She'd gone up there to help but got injured on the first day and could no longer do what she'd come to do. So she was down. Sad. Paul figured playing with those kids would be something. So he told her, why don't YOU give them those bikes.

While this woman was receiving the thanks and having the fun, the man was up on a roof, fixing a hole for someone.

Self-sacrifice is Landmark #3 for our three-point fix on the Way of Jesus.

So here, now, is how to navigate when you find yourself, no matter your circumstances, if you find yourself empty, confused, lacking purpose and direction and joy seems like a long-lost relative that's slipped into a fog of years and tears.

Use that old navigational tool, the three-point fix. You basically set those three landmarks up, Humility, Acts of Love for Neighbor and Self-Sacrifice and you begin to measure just how far away you are from each of them.

Your goal of course, is to come right into the intersection of all three. That's where the heart of Jesus is and, because that's where his heart is, that's where you're going to experience maximal Joy.

Try this also when you're making those big life decisions. Ask yourself - how will my decision allow me to become more humble, more loving to others, more sacrificial? There will be the right path, the Way of Jesus Christ.

Now look, do I wish I could go back in time and teach that poor lost lamb, who came to me years ago these principals, Jesus Way instead of handing her a book and a fixed set of things to do. For the Way of Jesus isn't as I've said, a checklist, a to-do list or set of instructions. It is instead a way to navigate home when lost.

Humility, Love and Self-Sacrifice.

That is the Way of Jesus,

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Scripture

Intro

John 14:6 – “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Humility

Matthew 3:13-15 – ““Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.’

John 13:5 – ““He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”

Philippians 2:3– ““Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

Love

Luke 22:24-37 – “A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”

John 15:12 – ““This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Self-Sacrifice

John 15:13 – “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

Romans 5:6-8 – ““For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Matthew 16:24-26 – “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”