

I AM THE WAY

Thomas said to Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. "

John is not proclaiming this about, or at least not limiting this proclamation to, the earthly form of Jesus. He clears his definitions from the very first words of his Gospel: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* (John 1:1, 14) Clearly John is not talking just about the man from Nazareth, but about Christ's true identity in realms beyond our comprehension.

In contemplation of the wonder of Christmas – of His coming – the thing I know most of all is that I know so very little. In true identity, Jesus is beyond our grasp, beyond definition, beyond comprehension or understanding. The mystery of Christmas is that this is the very One who is coming so close, so intimately and personally, so caringly and personally. The mind is stunned. The soul stands still. This cannot be. Yet the message of Christmas is that IT IS. This cannot be happening – but *it is* happening. Hear the angel choirs!

Despite all our foolish mental gyrations, we believe that Jesus is THE WAY. He embodies it. He is all that we can see or comprehend of it – and more. It closes nothing down, wraps nothing up. It merely opens it. Despite all accusations to the contrary, I do not have to scorn or dishonor any other "Way." I merely choose this one. In fact, I cannot have this WAY *unless* I choose it. No one will or can force it upon me. If it is forced, it is not the WAY. The WAY of the Lamb wins us, heals us, forgives us, redeems us ... but does not force us. Coercion is not the Lamb's WAY. He goes to enormous lengths to reveal that – and to incredible trouble and pain to prove it.

At Christmas, it is also very, very clear to me that I am not the WAY, and never will be. *He* is the WAY. The very most I can hope to be, if I know this, is a follower of His WAY – a walker of His PATH. That is the reason I am here. I presume it is the reason you are here. In both honor and anticipation, we come here because we want to be walkers of His WAY. And it's not like we can do that just today. It is more like an anniversary. We do not want to let it go by without some acknowledgment.

He came ... He comes ... He is the WAY. Therefore, we are walkers of His WAY.

Only, following His New WAY is a lot harder and more exciting than most people think, and is light-years beyond what is usually described. We do not need to go over it all at this time. We only need to open it up, hint at it a little, get some brief reminders for the celebration.

First of all, to be a follower – a walker of His WAY – I must accept His Message, not as theory or concept or philosophy, but as real for myself. I have to accept His love, and the love of the Father who sent Him. We can sing all we want to, but we literally cannot walk His WAY if we do not trust, accept, and believe in the love He has for us. You cannot give what you do not have. You cannot have what you will not accept. We all know this pretty well, I suppose. Yet after all these years, I still get up some mornings and cannot believe it. And the moment I cannot believe it, I start to revert again to the “Old Ways” – my ways, and the ways of the world all around me. I will not go into all the ugliness and sorrow that has caused me, or you. Today is too beautiful and special. But first, if I want to be part of it, I must accept His Message, even for myself. So must you.

Secondly, I have to accept His Message for others. That is even harder – especially when all around me, most of the time, people are trying to tell me the opposite. That is, most of the time people are telling me that Christianity is about how much **I** am supposed to do for others. Of course, that just drags me back into the same Old Ways, where I am supposed to be in control and in charge. But Christianity is *not* about what I can do for others. *I am not the WAY*. It is about what *He* can do for others. I am supposed to carry a Message about what **HE** can do for others, not step in between and try to do it myself. And if I really want to follow the New WAY – if I have really accepted His Message – it is not about how much I can *give* to others; it is about how much I *believe in them*.

How do I know this? I know it by watching Him. I certainly would never have imagined such a thing all by myself. Jesus transformed person after person, not by what He gave them, but by how much He believed in them: by how clearly He knew and trusted in who they really were – their identity under God – and not according to any perspective in this world. He is not the King of Handouts! He is the Prince of Peace – Messiah, Savior, Son of God.

I read and read in my New Testament to see where, to whom, and how often Jesus gives handouts – how often He bases His work and His ministry on gifts of money or goods of any kind. I read in vain. Not a single time do I find Jesus giving money to the needy. Maybe He did and nobody recorded it. Even so, that is significant, don't you think? Nobody thought of Him in that way. Nobody thought of Him doing that sort of thing. We all think we are supposed to and we keep telling others they are supposed to, but it has nothing to do with Jesus or His ministry or His WAY.

Why do we keep insisting that Jesus is about what we call “charity” (*caritas*)? That is not a “new way”! Humans have always tried to feel good about themselves by their gifts. Humans have always tried to control or ingratiate others by their gifts. Nero was lavish with his gifts. So was Hitler. So were some of the worst mayors New York City ever had. It is typical for tyrants to try to “enslave” people with their gifts. Better to have them dependent rather than strong and free. Who was one of the first people to set up soup kitchens in Chicago during the Depression? Al Capone. We have news clips of people talking about how wonderful he was and how grateful they were to him. If we cannot tell the difference between Jesus Christ and Al Capone, what are we doing here?

So now the church has tried to convince the whole world that the essence of Jesus' WAY – the real purpose of Christianity – is to give generic, nonpersonal gifts to people you don't even know and have no intention of truly caring about. This is “love”? This is what we have done to Jesus' WAY? And some people do not believe in Satan! A total reversal and denuding of the most powerful Message the earth has ever known, and some of us do not believe in Satan! Is Christianity changing the world with its physical gifts? Is doing it our way working? Are we converting people with our Christmas presents? Are we converting them with our charity programs? And how is it that *we* know ourselves to be converted by the presence of the Risen Christ – by encountering the Living God – but we think that *others* will be converted by whatever good they can find in our good deeds? Evil, sorrow, loneliness, and fear can be healed and redeemed by handouts? Mine cannot!

Jesus empowered, healed, trusted, and believed in people one at a time – all the way unto death. He commissioned – called – and gave new hope and identity to everyone who would in any way open themselves to Him. They were never the same again because they could no longer see or know or understand themselves in the same way, not after realizing

how *He* saw them. They did not go away with His coins in their pockets. They went away with His conviction, His vision, and His love burning in their hearts. And they knew beyond words that God's love was behind His, stretching to eternity. Reconciled to God: *That* is why He is called the Prince of Peace. That, and because He is in mortal combat with all that ever again tries to reduce us to mere human, physical stature.

Jesus does things for us we cannot do for ourselves – to mind, soul, heart, hope, purpose, identity. But strangely, and consistent with His love, He does not solve our problems for us; He does not take away our struggles in this world. He believes in us and inspires us until we start doing those things for ourselves. Otherwise, you see, He would only keep making us weaker and weaker – like we keep trying to do to others, in His name.

First we have to accept and trust His Message for ourselves. Then we have to accept and believe it for others. Then we can begin to be walkers of His WAY – carriers of His Message. Only, we are not the WAY. HE is the WAY.