

Sunday, May 7, 2023 *“Jesus the Way, Truth and Life”*

Acts 7: 54-60 | Peter 2:2-10 | John 14:1-14

Reading the headlines this week:

- 1) World Health Organization declares that COVID is no longer an emergency. Although considered in its pandemic phase, as it is marked by an exponential growth rate in many countries of the world. But it is now transitioning in Canada to endemic stage which is consistently present but not as widespread. A degree of caution is still needed. The transition from emergency crisis to management of covid19 because the virus is here to stay in the human population for the foreseeable future.
- 2) Grocery rebate cheques will be sent out to eligible Canadians in July. Those receiving it will be notified through tax systems or mail.
- 3) Canada Revenue Agency and union reached a deal to end strike and return to work. This is good news? Two days after tax deadline.
- 4) Alberta and wildfire season has begun in the spring.. not in the heat of summer.
- 5) Ukraine/Russia war continues

And of course the coronation of UK King Charles III was held on Saturday.

When we consider these headlines we think about our Canadian context and how we as individuals might be affected by the actions of others. We wonder about covid19 and how there are many people still experiencing symptoms and sickness in the world. Our tax returns were due at the end of April and now with workers back on the job the processing of these will be completed. The war between Russia/ Ukraine seems to flip flop as each takes responsibility of destruction in order to gain a piece of land. And then we see the pageantry of the beginning of the reign of a monarch through traditions mixed with modern methods of leadership. And it seems everyone has an opinion about all these issues and more.

So how do we sort through it all? How do we understand what these events might mean for each of us in the days ahead.

In these past weeks, this passage from John 14 had been shared several times in discussions, in prayer, and in celebrating the lives of people who we call good Christian people. This passage occurs when Jesus was teaching his disciples prior to his death. He told them that one of the disciples was going to betray him. He also told Peter that he would deny knowing

Jesus. But it is the discussion about Jesus being the Way to the Father that leads us to ask about foundations as Christian followers and what it means to believe and have faith.

Jesus teaches about his Father's house and the hope we have that our dwelling place with him is being prepared. He tells the disciples that he leave them and go to be with God the Father so that one day we will be received by Him. Jesus then states, "and you know the way to the place where I am going." But Thomas was not understanding. We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." IF you know me, you will know my Father."

This is when Philip asked more questions about Jesus and God and how they are related and what this means. Philip did not understand then and for many people this is also the case now. How are God- the Father and Jesus related/connected? How might we know the way to God? Jesus tried to explain this to Philip. Even after spending much time with Jesus, Philip was not sure who Jesus was in relation to God the Father. Jesus then said, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." So the way to the Father is Jesus.

But what does this mean for us living in 2023? It is having faith and believing in Jesus God's Son who came to live a human life so that would learn from him and be forgiven of sin. It means having understanding that is helpful to every day life decisions and choices which keep us focused on Christ's way to live. It means having the knowledge of right and wrong in our hearts and minds so that we live righteous and good lives. Living out the way as faithful followers of Jesus- that is as Christians. It means standing up for your faith in Jesus for he stood up for you and took upon himself the sins of the world for your sake: so that you can be one with God again.

After Jesus ascends into heaven, one of his faithful followers Stephen was arrested. He is brought before the council and false witnesses make the case that he spoke against the synagogue and the laws. They state that Jesus would destroy what was known and that he would change customs. Stephen is a man of faith, full of grace and power who did great wonders and signs among the people. The impact of Stephen's life and service for God on the community was such that the Jewish leaders became fearful. They were already suffering in

their consciences for Jesus' death, and Stephen's preaching about Jesus had people listening once again. They turn their attention once again to this threat of their security. Stephen was serving as a leader in the synagogue (deacon) and he is falsely accused of turning the people against Moses and God. But instead of keeping quiet, Stephen shares his convictions which arises within him that this is a moment to bear witness to Christ. And he does. The people listening to him, lead him outside the city. And there is he stoned to death. But as he is hurt- he prays, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He cries out in a loud voice- "Lord do not hold this sin against them." And dies. At his death, he was imitating Jesus: Jesus prayed to God the Father- Stephen prayed to Jesus. Christ said, "I commit"; Stephen said, "Receive". Christ prayed for His accusers; Stephen similarly prayed for his: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." But how is this relevant to you?

Just how deep is your faith? What is your faith about? Faith is an unknown mystery however faith can be beautifully portrayed in the darkness of our eyes. Your relationship in God is yours. It means you cannot contract it out to others neither can you transfer it someone else.

As a church we earnestly pray that people will grow in their faith and understanding of Jesus as we learn His ways through reading the Bible but we also put into action what Jesus taught. It is in this that the truth of Christ becomes known. And it is understanding that life on earth is only temporary but eternal life with God the Father is forever.

What is Christ's way? It is in how we love others, rejoice in hope, are patient in suffering and persevering in prayer. It is in extending hospitality to strangers, blessing others. The way of Christ is the way of love (as Paul writes in Romans 12)

The truth is what Jesus came to testify to. For he said, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." As illustrated in Jesus' words, I am the Good Shepherd. Are we His sheep who listen to his voice and follow him each day?

The life is the promise of eternal life made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection for our sakes. This is foundational to our faith. But the question we ask and have been hearing about this week is are you following Jesus as your way to eternal life ? or are you still wandering the path of uncertainty?

Our world seems to be filled with extremes. There are people skeptical about what we learned as children- the question of right and wrong is blurred because of artificial intelligence taking over human ethics in some disciplines. We wonder about God yet are skeptical in knowing that Jesus really did live a human life. We question the rational thinkers in leadership and yet often we cannot express why we have doubt. Jesus met a man who confessed that he was filled with doubts about him. He said, "help my unbelief." This is what we are all doing here today—moving away from unbelief to faith a little bit at a time. It is all right to doubt and question, but we need to seek the same kind of honesty in faith –filled moments in order to grow in faith.

It is by faith that we believe heaven is real and where our loved ones await our coming. But in this world there seems to be confusion, skepticism and uncertainty when it comes to right living. But if we believe in God- we know Jesus as Saviour then the Spirit guides us to live and love others following the way of Christ. It is our prayer that all will find faith in God- Father, Son and Spirit so that we can believe in the way, the truth and the life even though there are many in the world who close their eyes.

I share with you a song, "Show me the Way" by Styx from 1990. Let it be our prayer that by faith we believe in Jesus- the way, truth and life as we seek our way to live and love. Amen.