

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life

John 14:1-7

Not long ago someone asked me, "What is salvation?" It is a good question and one that we Christians struggle with. Our Gospel lesson today is part of Jesus' farewell discourse that begins in chapter 13, and continues to the end of chapter 17 in St. John's

Gospel.

The farewell discourse is an influential style of ancient writing; Moses' farewell discourse comprises most of the Book of Deuteronomy. Plato's dialogue, *Apology*, is also a type of farewell discourse. However, no one uses "the farewell discourse" as explicitly or as well as St. John. In this teaching, Jesus offers great comfort and promise to the disciples, whose lives are about to fall in shambles at their feet.

In this last speech of Jesus to his disciples, he tells them many things, but for our purpose today he offers them one of his seven "I am" sayings. Today our reading centers on "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*" (14:5). Jesus first promises the disciples that they can be assured that even after Jesus leaves them, "where I am, there you may be also" (v. 3). But Thomas asks: "*How can we know the way?*" (v. 5). Jesus' response to Thomas is our subject today.

Often in Christian theology this way is taken to mean simply a set phrase, or doctrinal formation that states that ". Yet what this text may really mean is that Jesus, as the tangible manifestation of God, is the relationship and manner by which God receives people into Communion or association. Jesus is the particular and special revelation of God, not a statement that God has exclusive claim on only those who know some secret, or "Gnostic," knowledge.

Salvation is all about being in relationship with God and about love and charity with neighbor.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, some of the "greatly astounded" disciples heard Jesus talking about how difficult it would be for a rich person to get into heaven. When Jesus employed the image of "*a camel*" going "*through the eye of a needle*" these disciples asked Jesus, "*Then who can be saved*" (St. Matthew 19:25; see also St. Mark 10:26; St. Luke 18:26)?

In some sense this is the Christian question. The short answer is that everyone can be saved, if only because salvation is a gift from God, and God gives as God wills. Christian theology layers requirements and preconditions on God's gift. Therefore we simply remember that God can, and perhaps will, save anyone whom God decides to save.

Clearly, most Christians would confess that salvation or going to heaven is the aim of the Christian life. Yet in today's world the ways we understand salvation and talk about it, sometimes keep us from grasping any understanding of salvation from a biblical perspective. Rather than a scholarly exploration, let's look at some fundamentals of salvation.

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley's Journal narrates that he "*felt*" his "*heart strangely warmed.*" Wesley then writes, "*I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he [Christ] had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*" Salvation concerns God's assurance to us that our missteps (trespasses/sins) have been blotted out by God's grace (the unmerited favor from God to people).

Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*" and "*Come, follow me*" (St. Matthew 19:21). If we were honest, we would admit that most of our troubles surface from our character, our obsessions, and our choices. Our choices influence other aspects of our wellbeing, our health, and relationships. We each suffer from our bad choices, and St. Paul reminds us that sin leads to death.

I might suggest that suffering is sometimes the journey between sin and death. Yet St. Paul also points out that "*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death*" (Romans 8:2). In other words, if people want to get spiritually healthy, they will choose God's salvation offered in Jesus Christ.

Rev. Karen Siegfriedt, an Episcopal priest in California writes helpfully: "*Salvation is the healing of the human race; the process by which we are transformed into the likeness of Christ. Salvation comes from a Latin word which we translate "salve," which has the meaning of healing.*"

Salvation is a spiritually healthy way to save our lives, even physically. God offers us a path to abundant life-and wants us on it- and frees us to make a healthy choice.

We miss the opportunity to testify for Jesus when we remain silent. Those who need to hear the gospel may conclude that salvation is not important enough to talk about. We old- line Christians profess the historic Christian faith in God, incarnate in Jesus Christ

for our salvation. We believe that salvation is always at work in human history in the Holy Spirit. Living in a covenant of grace under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we participate in the first fruits of God's coming reign and pray for its full realization.

Salvation is nothing less than God's gift of unmerited favor. When we look scornfully at another's spiritual state, we do violence to Jesus' spirit. Rich or poor, none of us gets to heaven by our own merit. We only arrive in God's realm by God's grace. We fall into spiritual pride when we look at other people's salvation with suspicion.

How can we know the way? We know the way because Jesus told us: "*I am the way.*"
Alleluia. Amen