

"A GUIDE FOR LIVING"

Written Text only, no worship Service due to COVID-19 Pandemic

JOHN 14:1-14

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During these stressful times of the COVID-19 Epidemic I see this text as a guide for our living. The heart of this text are the words of Jesus when he says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."

I can't think of any other times in our lives, more than now, when we need these words for Jesus: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life;

Jesus is the only way for us to live. HE is the way to life, the way to the heavenly Father, and the way to the heavenly mansions in the sky.

But many of us are still searching for the meaning of life in things of this world. But Jesus is telling us that he is the way in this world. He is our guide. He is our only way to the Father, and our heavenly home.

There is parable that says it well:

A traveler was returning to his home from a journey to a distant country. At nightfall he arrived at the entrance to a vast forest. Unable either to delay his journey or retrace his steps, he was prepared to traverse the sullen forest when he came upon an old shepherd from whom he asked the way.

"Alas!" cried the shepherd. "It is not easy to point it out, for the forest is crisscrossed by hundreds of paths winding in every direction. They are almost all similar in appearance, though all with one exception lead to the Great Abyss."

"What is the Great Abyss?" the traveler inquired.

"It is the abyss which surrounds the forest," replied the shepherd. "Moreover, the forest is filled with robbers and wild beasts. In particular, it is ravaged by an enormous serpent so that scarcely a day passes but we find the remains of some

unfortunate traveler who fell prey to it. Still," the shepherd continued, "as it is impossible to arrive at the place where you are going without traversing the forest, I have, through a motive of compassion 'stationed myself at the entrance of the forest to assist and direct travelers. I have also placed my sons at different intervals to assist me in the same good work. Their services and mine are at your disposal, and I am ready to accompany you if you so desire.

The candor and venerable appearance of the old man satisfied the traveler and he accepted the proposal. The shepherd held a lantern with one hand and with the other, took the arm of the traveler. They then set out upon their journey through the dark forest.

After walking for some distance, the traveler felt his strength waning. "Lean on me," said the shepherd. The traveler did so, and was able to continue the journey. At length the lamp began to flicker.

"Ah!" groaned the traveler. "The oil is nearly spent, and the light will soon be gone. What will become of us now?"

"Do not fear," consoled the shepherd. "We shall soon meet one of my sons, who will supply us with more oil." Just then the traveler perceived a glimmer of light shining through the darkness. The light shone from a small cabin by the side of the narrow path. At the sound of the shepherd's well-known voice, the cabin door swung open. A seat was offered to the weary traveler, and some plain but substantial food was set before him. Thus refreshed, the traveler set out again, guided by the shepherd's son. In this manner, the traveler journeyed on for the rest of the night. From time to time, they stopped at different cabins built along the path. At each stop he obtained refreshment, a bit of rest and was furnished with a new guide. With the dawning of daylight, the traveler arrived, without incident, at the farthest boundary of the forest. Only then did he appreciate the magnitude of the service rendered him by the shepherd and his sons. At the very edge of the forest, right before his feet, lay a frightful precipice, at the bottom of which he could distinguish the roar of an angry current.

"This," said his guide "is the Great Abyss which my father spoke about. No one knows its depth, for it is always covered with a thick fog which no eye can penetrate.

As he spoke, he heaved a deep sigh, and wiped a tear from his eyes. "You seem grieved," said the traveler.

"How can it be otherwise?" replied his guide. "Can I look at the abyss without thinking of the thousands of unfortunate people who every day are swallowed up in it? In vain do my father and my brothers offer our services? Very few accept them, and of those few the greater portion, after journeying for a few hours, accuses us of needlessly alarming them. They despise our advice and set out on paths of their own choosing.

The consequence is that they soon lose their way and are devoured by the serpent, murdered by robbers, or plunge headlong into the abyss. You see there is only this one little bridge by which the Great Abyss can be crossed, and the way which leads to the bridge is known to us alone Pass over with confidence," continued the guide. He turned to the traveler, embraced him and said, "On the other side is your true home."

The traveler, overcome with gratitude, thanked his charitable guide and promised never to forget him. He crossed the narrow bridge and discovered he was now in his own land. His family was there to welcome him.

Can you see in this modern parable the guiding hand of God and his son, Jesus Christ? Jesus guides us around and through the abysses of life. The way stations along the way are the saints we encounter the cabins are, I think, the church. And our adventure is over when we cross the abyss which is death and the grave, and we are ushered home through Jesus crossing the bridge to the heavenly mansions. But notice; many become weary of being lead along the path, venturing out on their own and ending up in the abyss.

So the question can be asked of each of us is this? Will you allow Jesus to lead your life? Jesus says **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life;**

I have read *The Chronicles of Narnia*" by CS Lewis. The lion, Aslan, is the Christ figure through the stories.

In the first book, Jill comes to Narnia and is separated from the others. She is thirsty and sees a stream of water but Aslan, the lion, is near so she does not know what to do.

"Are you not thirsty?" said the lion.

"I'm dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I -- could I -- would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to -- do anything to me, if I do come? Said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

"Do you eat girls? she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion.

Aren't we like Jill? We are now even more thirsty for the word of God to renew our lives, to make it all "normal" again. but many still don't dare to approach Christ.

Are you willing to let Jesus lead, are you willing to let Jesus guide you through life?

Jesus says **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life;**

Professor Gerhard Frost of Luther College tells this story:

'Imagine you are walking through your neighborhood and you pass a house where the family is loading the car to go on vacation. There are three children all under the age of 5 in the mini van waiting eagerly for Mom and Dad to finish the last minute details.

You walk up to the mini van, poke your head in the window and ask: "Where are you going?" They don't know. "What highway are you taking?" Wide-eyed they say they have no idea "Where are you going to have supper tonight?" Again no idea! Then you ask: "With whom are you going?" Their eyes brighten, "With Daddy and Mommy, of course!!" They answer!!

They didn't know exactly where they were going, they didn't know the way, they didn't know where they would eat or sleep, but with whom they were going that they knew. That was all that mattered. They were going with Mommy and Daddy. Mommy and Daddy would take care of them; they would provide for them and would bring them to their final destination.

That is the point of our gospel lesson. We travel the road of life and we don't know what lies ahead, we don't know all the turns and curves along the way but the one thing we know, I hope we can all say this; the one thing that we do know, is that Jesus is guiding us. God will guide us through this Epidemic and will offer us a great celebration.

Years ago, I was enthralled as I listened to a pastor who for several years had faithfully served the church. His executive responsibilities had taken him all over this country. As he concluded his message, he told of one of the most frightening yet thought-provoking experiences of his life.

He had been on a long flight. The first warning of the approaching problems came when the sign on the airplane flashed on: "Fasten your seat belts." Then, after a while, a calm voice said, "We shall not be serving the beverages at this time as we are expecting a little turbulence. Please be sure your seat belt is fastened."

As he looked around the aircraft, it became obvious that many of the passengers were becoming apprehensive. Later, the voice of the announcer said, "We are so sorry that we are unable to serve the meal at this time. The turbulence is still ahead of us."

And, then, the storm broke. The ominous cracks of thunder could be heard even above the roar of the engines. Lightening lit up the darkening skies and within moments, that great plane was like a cork tossed around on a celestial ocean. One moment, the airplane was lifted on terrific currents of air; the next, it dropped as if it were about to crash.

The pastor confessed that he shared the discomfort and fear of those around him. He said, "As I looked around the plane, I could see that nearly all the passengers were upset and alarmed. Some were praying. The future seemed ominous and many were wondering if they would make it through the storm.

And then, I suddenly saw a girl to whom the storm meant nothing. She had tucked her feet beneath her as she sat on her seat and was reading a book. Everything within her small world was calm and orderly. Sometimes she closed her eyes, then she would read again; then she would straighten her legs, but worry and fear were not in her world. When the plane was being buffeted by the terrible storm, when it lurched this way and that, as it rose and fell with frightening severity, when all the adults were scared half to death, that marvelous child was completely composed and unafraid."

The minister could hardly believe his eyes.

It was not surprising therefore, that when the plane finally reached its destination and all the passengers were hurrying to disembark, he lingered to speak to the girl whom he had watched for such a long time.

Having commented about the storm and behavior of the plane, he asked why she had not been afraid. The sweet child replied, "Sir, my Dad is the pilot, and he is taking me home." Jesus says **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life;"**
Amen!

Let us Pray: Almighty God, our hearts are heavy with hurt from our friends and family affected by this terrible Epidemic. Lord, we need healing that only can come from your almighty hands. We thank you for the gifts you have provided for their care and the welcome home for those that have passed from us. We know that you are the only way and the only truth, and only life for each of us. Give us safety as we gather together in your holy name. Amen!