

**ROOM FOR LOVE**  
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May 18, 2014  
Fifth Sunday of Easter  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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**John 14:1-14**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going."

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."

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I have a good friend who likes to needle me about religion, especially about Christianity. Just this past Monday, out of the blue, he says to me: *Jesus said some really stupid things.*

Really? Like what?

*Well, for starters: I am the way, the truth, and the life.*

And what's so stupid about that?

*It's stupid because it implies that Jesus is the only way, the only truth, the only life and if you don't believe, it you're going to hell.*

Do you believe that, I asked him?

*No, of course not. It's silly and ridiculous.*

Well, that makes me sad, I said, with the saddest and straightest face I could manage. We've been friends for a long, long time and it hurts me to know that I won't see you in the after life because I'll be in heaven and you'll be in hell.

He laughed. He knows me too well to think I meant a word of it.

The truth is: even if Jesus did say *I am the way, the truth, and the life*, he didn't say *and if you don't believe it, you're going to hell.*

He didn't say that, but the institutions that arose in his name did. The Roman Church said it for a thousand or more years: *Outside the Church there is no salvation*—which many take to mean: *no ticket to heaven*. And then there's the evangelicals who say: *unless you accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior you're going to hell, because Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.*

As it turns out, our elaborate, physical notions of heaven and hell were not and could not have been on Jesus' mind. Those notions were invented much later to terrify and thus control people.

Besides, that's not the only way of understanding those words. As Marcus Borg and many others would say: *that interpretation is a terrible perversion of Jesus and the gospel*. It makes the way of Jesus, and thus Christianity, an otherworldly religion and a religion of exclusivity, when it can be and should be seen as just the opposite.

To truly follow the way of Jesus is, in fact, to discover many rooms in the “Father’s house,” which in the gospel of John is a symbol. “The Father’s house” is a metaphor for a relationship with the Heart of Reality, with the One that is All, in All, before All, beyond All, that is to say, the One who is the meaning of life. To dwell in the Father’s house is not to reside in heaven but to abide in love here and now.

Those who abide in love abide in God here and now. “Eternal life,” as used in this gospel, is not about living forever elsewhere. It literally means living abundantly now.

But to see all this, you have to understand this gospel for what it is. And that’s not easy because most of us were taught to see the gospels as biographies or documentaries of Jesus of Nazareth. None of the four gospels are that. Especially this one!

This gospel was composed nearly 70 years after the death of Jesus. Even though it appears to be about Jesus of Nazareth, it is more like an extended poetic essay on the meaning of life, with Jesus as a prop or character. Jesus is employed as the personification of the *Word*, or what the Greeks called *Logos*, or what Confucianism calls the *Tao*, or what we might call the meaning of life, the heart of reality.

Many things are attributed to Jesus in this gospel that he probably never said or did. He is a vehicle for an argument, namely this: *the heart and soul of reality is love and it is more like a companion than an impersonal force*. In other words, the heart of reality is not Aristotle’s impersonal, Prime Mover as many thought. The heart of reality is Love, according to this essay.

This gospel is an argument for the meaning of life as love—compassion and companionship. The first question put to “Jesus” is: *Where do you abide (or, where is your dwelling place, or where do you room)?* To which “Jesus” said: *Come and see*. And over time they would see works of great love. The blind, crippled, and sick healed. The hungry fed. Sinners forgiven. The dead raised.

The essay begins with a stunning prologue, or overture: *In the beginning was the Word, the Word was God and the Word became flesh*. Or we might put it another way, a way this author could not say at that time: *out of the unfolding impulse pulsating through 4.5 billion years of evolution arose humankind, and in one particular human named Jesus we happened to catch a glimpse of divinity, the heart of reality. We glimpsed love without limits, love without boundaries, love without fear, love even for enemies*.

So, says this first century Jewish author, let me tell you what I believe the voice at the center of reality might say, if it, he or she would speak to us. And what that voice says is linked to “I AM,” which just happens to be the name of the Holy Mystery revealed to Moses at the Burning Bush.

Remember that?

Moses asks the Voice burning in his heart: Who are you? And the Voice said: *Yahweh*, which is the verb to be— *I am who I am. I am what I will be. I am being and becoming*. In other words the Mystery at the Heart of Reality is a verb unfolding not a noun to put in a box.

And thus the voice of the TAO speaks through the voice of “Jesus” in seven distinct “I am’s.”

I am the bread of life.  
I am the light of the world.  
I am the door.  
I am the good shepherd.  
I am the resurrection and the life.  
I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

I am the vine.

That is to say: *the heart of reality is compassion and companionship.*

When you are hungry for love and meaning, *I am the bread of life.*

When you are in the dark, *I am the light of the world.*

When you need a way through, *I am the door.*

When you are afraid and hurting, *I am the good shepherd*

When you feel as good as dead, *I am the resurrection and the life.*

When you are confused and troubled, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*

When you are disconnected, *I am the vine.*

And since I am in you and you are in me, you are all of these as well. You are bread. You are light. We are all connected. We are all one. There's no room for ego; there's only room for love.

I am you as you are me as we are altogether in the Father, which is to say, in the One who is at heart of it all. We are one. There are no egos to pamper or protect. There is no division.

So when we hear, *no one comes to the Father but by me*, it's fairly easy to translate. *No one comes to the Father except by the way of love. In my Father's house are many mansions, or more accurately, many rooms or abiding places.* In other words, there is room for all. There is always room for love. So where I am is where you can be too because I am always in love. It's not about "place." It's about experience.

I am the way, the truth and the life, turns out to be one of the most inclusive expressions in the Christian tradition, if you see it rightly. For the way is not Christianity. The way is not Jesus. The way is what the icon or symbol Jesus manifests, which is the heart of reality, the heart of God, namely love in all its many splendored manifestations.

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#### HYMN

"Though I May Speak"