

The Grace that Jesus is the Way

As it says in the bulletin – over the next three Sundays, we're going to explore together the grace – the desperately needed grace – that Jesus **is** the Way and the Truth and the Life.

That's what Jesus says in **John 14:6**, "*I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.*" A line many of us know.

But we need to not just know it. We need to see the beauty of it. To feel the reality of it – as a gift of pure grace – to a world that's lost its' way (or rather, people who've lost our way), to a post-truth world, and to a world that's turning everywhere for life and coming up empty...

And, specifically, this morning, I want to help us recover the beautiful grace – the desperately needed grace – **that Jesus is the Way.**

And I'll admit right from the start – that I'm going to explore this reality more in its broader biblical understanding, than how we'd normally interpreted it in **John 14**. Because in John 14:6, Jesus explicitly refers to His being the Way – as meaning the Way to the Father. Which is beautifully good news – that is intimately related to where we'll go this morning...

But beyond **John 14**, the concept of the Way (in both the Old & New Testament) refers again and again to the **ethics** of one's life – the **moral character** of how one lives – the **Way** of one life...

In the language of the Psalms, the call of God is to *walk in His Way (or Ways)*, and not in the Way (or ways) of the wicked...

Psalm 1:1 – *"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers... (v.6) For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction..."*

Jeremiah 6:16 states it so well – and we'll let this be our launch point...

This is what the LORD says:

*"Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.*

But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'"

Let's pray -----

Dallas Willard, the late professor of philosophy at USC and a brilliant and godly Christian author and teacher, tells a story in the opening chapter of his landmark book, The Divine Conspiracy, about a **young woman studying** at Harvard University.

He describes her as coming from "a Midwestern, working-class background" – which means that, in contrast to many of her peers, she had to work **menial jobs** around campus to cover her tuition and

bills. Specifically, **she cleaned other students’ rooms** to pay her way through school.

But it didn’t last.

After a few semesters, she quit her job and dropped out.

Not because the work was too hard, or the academics too challenging, or the school too expensive, but she quit her job and dropped out of Harvard *because, day after day, as she went about her menial job, she found herself harassed and treated horribly by the very people she sat beside in class.*

One specific classmate – a young man – repeatedly propositioned her for sex as she went about her work. A student “with whom she had **two ‘moral reasoning’ courses**, in which he excelled and received the highest of grades.”

I hope you grasp the incredible irony of that statement.

In her exit interview with a trusted professor, she stated in frustration, “I’ve been taking all these philosophy courses, and we talk about what’s true, what’s important, what’s *good*. **Well, how do you** teach people to **be** good?”

What’s the point of knowing good if you don’t keep trying to **become** a good person?”

Willard tells this story to make the point that we live in a day and age when knowledge and critical thinking are widely championed –

and those of you who have just started your semester at UVic or Camosun – or, for that matter, high school – are encountering or about to encounter this first hand.

We live in a day when knowledge and critical thinking are widely-championed, **but no longer in a way that necessarily leads to, or even contributes to, the formation of character – a way of being – a **way** of life in the world and in relationships – **that is truly good**. What the biblical authors speak of as “**the way of the righteous**.” A way of live shaped and guided by a holy love for God and neighbor...**

As Willard’s story affirms, it is more common and much easier to get an ‘A’ in a course on ‘Moral Reasoning’, than it is to cultivate a moral life... To learn and live in a way that is truly good... and not just good for ourselves, but for all...

Over the last while, I’ve been working my way through a brilliant and dense book on sexuality and relationships in our day and age – exploring where we’re at, how we got here, and the way forward.

The book is called **Divine Sex: a Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age**, by a pastor/scholar, based in New Zealand, named **Jonathan Grant**.

It’s not an easy read, but well worth the work. And always stimulates **interesting looks** when left out on the coffee table.

One of the things the author names (and he has the stats to prove it) is the sad irony that though the vast majority of contemporary men and women “view intimate relationships as essential to their personal identity”; more and more, these same contemporary men and women find themselves unable to cultivate, sustain and commit to these very relationships.

Longing for deep, personal, committed relationships, but unable to truly love well and for the long haul. This just doesn’t seem possible to many these days. Which is why many simply settle for casual, non-committal sexual relationships. Or the companionship of pornography.

Because committing to love well for the long haul seems unrealistic. Undoable. We’re just not up for it.

Again, it’s much easier to get an ‘A’ in a course on ‘Moral Reasoning’, than it is to become a person of deep moral character... To learn and live in a way that **is truly good** – from the heart...

Applied more directly, it’s much easier to get a Masters Degree in Marriage and Family Counseling, than it is to **become a person who** can and will cultivate, sustain and commit to the kinds of self-sacrificing love that a healthy marriage requires...

Simply put: when it comes to the matter of our character – *and life will inevitably bring us there* – many of us have actually **lost our way.**

A life of holy love for God and neighbor feels far from our grasp – or even our aim...

And yet, is this not what we most deeply long for?

Not just to get the degree, or the job, or the guy, or the girl, or the ring, or the holiday, or the retirement, but to **become** people who's hearts and lives run in the right direction – whether or not we get the (*you fill in the blank*)? Do we not all long to become women and men whose presence and participation in the world is a source of blessing and a gift of grace... Whose lives are marked and guided by holy love for God and neighbor?

Is this not what we most deeply long for?

Is this not what we were created for?

That's what Genesis 1-2 tells us.

At the climax of the creation story, we read these words –

Genesis 1:26-28.

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind **in our image, in our likeness**, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and

the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

It’s easy to read this and focus on the tasks outlined (*to rule, to subdue, to be fruitful and multiply*), but we must not miss the repeated and unique emphasis that God made humanity **in His image...**

Which is to say – **that we were made to Walk in God’s Ways** – to bear God’s image – a represent and reveal **God’s character and values, His priorities and desires** in all we do...

This is what it means to be created **in God’s image**: we were created to know and reflect – **to walk in God’s ways** – that **God’s values and desires – that God’s Ways – would be alive in us...** for *God’s glory, for the sake of the world, and for our joy in Him...*

And let’s not miss that: that life in God’s image – in God’s Ways – is a **grace-given invitation to participate in God’s joy** – and to be the means of His blessing to the world... to delight in, experience and contribute to God’s good and beautiful shalom on earth – *as it is in heaven...*

And we all know this – whether or not we’ve read Genesis...

NT Wright, in his book, Simply Christian, makes this case.

He makes the compelling case that **everyone of us – every person on earth** – experiences life within the grasp of four

fundamental dreams – or aches. Four fundamental dreams or aches that are really four echoes of **God’s** dream, **God’s** ache, **God’s** purpose for our lives and world.

He says - We all live with a deep dream and cry

for **justice**,

for **spirituality (or transcendence)**,

for **relationships**

and for **beauty**.

Each of these, he says, when experienced, resonate deep in our hearts and minds as **the way things are meant to be...**

And conversely, each of us, when these are absent, experiences a deep existential ache... We know in our bones that **this is not the way it’s supposed to be...**

And this **is** the case – this is our experience – because these are all expressions of **God’s** dream – **God’s** purpose – **God’s** intention – for the world...

They are all fundamental dynamics of life as God intended it...

Without exploring all four, let me just linger for a moment on the first – **justice**... Cause I think this opens up a window to all four...

Wright claims that we all **dream the dream of justice**.

We all live with the dream of

“a world at one, a world put to rights, a world where things work out, where societies function fairly and efficiently, where we not only know what we ought to do but actually do it...”

And this dream – this ache – **isn't** something we have to be taught. It shows up on the playground as a child – with this deep sense that **things should be fair**. He says,

“A sense of justice comes with the kit of being human. We know about it, as we say, in our bones.”

“**And yet we have** a sense that justice itself slips through our fingers... Sometimes it works; often it doesn't. Innocent people get convicted; guilty people are let off. The bullies get away with wrongdoing...”

We see this happening on a global level – on a national level – in the systems that govern our world... And it breaks our hearts and makes us cry out...

And – **more startling** – we find this happening **with and in each of us...** Wright confesses,

“The line between justice and injustice, between things being right and things not being right, can't be drawn between 'us' and 'them'. **It runs right down through the middle of each one of us.**”

Which we all know by experience...

And the same story can be told of **each of these dreams** and aches... *for spirituality (or transcendence)... for relationships... for beauty...*

Each of these dreams pervades our lives – as expressions of our deepest hungers and joy.

And yet, **at times, these are also the** places of **our deepest pain**... A pain that we ourselves often play a part in...

In the language of the Bible, we were made to know the beauty and goodness of a life lived in holy love for God and neighbor. This is the Way of the Righteous... This is what it means to bear God’s image...

And yet, as we all know by experience, our hearts and lives often bend and run other ways...

Oh, we may still get an A in “Moral Reasoning”, but back in the dormroom, or at the beach, or in our family, or in our solitude, our hearts and lives bend away from God’s Ways... so often, and so easily...

And into this – the gospel of Jesus rings out as incredible news – **incredibly GOOD news!**

For in Jesus, God Himself has come into our world to show us the Way – to be the Way for us – and to invite us to **follow Him...**

Oh, thank God. That the gospel isn’t just an invitation to believe the right things, but an invitation to **follow Jesus – God Himself** – into a new and better Way – a Way that leads to life... the Life we were created for, and that our hearts most deeply long for...

Who understands the Way that the leads to Life better than the One who made it all and called it good?!

*And here in the gospel – we find Jesus – God Himself – the One who made it all and called it good – standing before us – announcing **(Matthew 4:19)**, “**Come, follow me...**”*

Come, follow Me – for **I am the Way**...

For **I AM the Way!** -----

Which **we know**... In the life of Jesus, as Christians and non-Christians in every generation have affirmed... In the life and death of Jesus we see **the Beautiful Way – the Good Way – the Way of the Righteous** lived out – in living color...

In Jesus, we see a life of holy love for God and neighbor lived perfectly and completely...

And in His grace – **Jesus** – the One who **is** the Way – comes to each of us – those who’ve lost our way – and invites us – “**Come. Come, follow Me.**”

To a world that’s lost it’s way...

To women and men who’ve lost our way – and can’t find our way back – Jesus steps into the story of our lives and says to each one of us – “**I am the Way**” – “**Come, follow Me.**”

And we need to grasp this. The reality and grace of this...

That the gospel is about far more than our souls – and our beliefs. It is **about our lives**... *The whole of our lives.*

The whole of life!

As many have said before – Christianity is not fundamentally a belief system, or just a matter of our inner space. **It is a life.** A life lived in *and with and by and for God* – **by the grace of Jesus...**

A life that **embraces and impacts all that we are** – every dream in our heart, every ache in our bones, every passion in our soul, every craving in our bodies, every capacity we've acquired – **every fiber of our being...**

Here and there, we question how much **really** God cares about some aspect of our lives (*often the reference is to our sexual lives*) – as though God only really cares about *what's in our hearts*.

I came across a line last year in a book by a self-identified non-religious person who was studying world religions... and expressed a common conviction in our day... **She wrote: "We can't wrap our heads around a God who is more concerned about our private parts than the contents of our heart."**

And I get it. In a way, I can understand what she's getting at.

But in scripture and in Jesus, we discover something **greater** than this. That it's not **either/or** – one or the other – it's **both-and!** it's **all of it!** **In Jesus, we discover that God cares about it all!**

The Bible is incredibly consistent in its' **insistence** that life with God and love for God is something that involves and entails every

facet of our being – **our heart and soul** and mind and strength. Which is just the Hebrew way of saying – **with everything...**

Which to some could seem **undesirable**.

But is, in fact, **just the opposite**. Because **to say** that God cares about it all is to discover that God knows it all... that God sees it all... and that God **can redeem it all...**

And by that I don't mean “**fix**” it all – but that He can lead us to live in a way where all that we are – all that we do – is drawn into his redemptive story in our lives...

And that, my friends, is good news – that God, in grace – in Jesus – has come **to show us the Way** – and to invite us to **follow Him** into His Way...

As far as I can see – **this is exactly what we need**.

It's what **I need**...

Not just to **believe in Jesus** and head out the door again to live **our way** – the way we've been living – a way that **we know** doesn't lead to life... But to be saved from **our way!**

And this is exactly what Jesus has come to do...

This is the grace of His call – “**follow Me**” – that we would be saved from **our ways** through real discipleship to Jesus – bowing our

lives to follow Jesus – **learning from Him and in Him the Way that leads to Life...**

So about us? What about you today?

In what way or ways is Jesus' call a gift of grace that you need right now?

What ways in you NEED – MUST be redeemed by Jesus and transformed by His grace?

Where do you NEED and LONG to be saved from your ways – by Jesus?

Hear again the Word of God through the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 6:16.

This is what the LORD says:

*"Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,*

***ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.***

Some of us today **know** that our soul is **so weary** from the Way and Ways we've been living.

If that's you, hear **the invitation of Jesus** today again – or maybe for the first time...

Matthew 11:28-30

*"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **you will find rest for your souls.** For my yoke is easy and my burden light."*

This is the grace of Jesus’ call – “**follow Me**” – that we might leave behind our wearying ways, as we learn *from Him and in Him* the Way that leads to Life... and rest... and joy... As we learn from Jesus the Way that is truly **the Good Way** and **the Good Life...**

for God’s glory, for the sake of the world, & for our joy in Him...

----- afterward/benediction

Here’s my second greatest fear this morning. (First, would be that you’ve heard God speak to you today and you blow it off. Don't let that happen. If God is speaking to you today – it's in love – respond to His invitation...)

But my other fear is that you’d walk out of here today committing to be better and do better. But friends, that is not the call today – because on our own, we can’t walk in God’s way. The call isn’t to go out and be good or better, but to **come to Jesus – to come follow Jesus – who alone can and will lead us into His Way and Life...**

I love how in the early church – as recorded for us in Acts 9 and 19 – the early Christians were referred to as simply this – as “the Way” – “Followers of the Way”.

In the grace of God, may this be **your** story and **our** story this year – that we would be and be known as **People of the Way** – alive in the Ways of God **as we follow Jesus together...**