

- ✘ Jesus said to them: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
- ✘ Here’s the first thing many think of when they hear John 14:6
  - Doesn’t mean that all Hindus are going to Hell?
- ✘ If you look back at the history of the Church, what has this phrase given us?
  - A separation of the world into two big categories: those who are “saved” and those who are “unsaved.”
  - Those who are right and those who are wrong, those who are good and those who are bad.
  - What else has it given us?
    - ⤴ Conversions of whole peoples and nations, either by proclaiming the Gospel, or (oftentimes) by using the sword.
    - ⤴ The Crusades. The Indian Wars. Various burnings at the stake.
- ✘ At the same time, as the church was attempting to convert whole nations of peoples, the church itself was being transformed, in ways big and small:
  - One of the small ways of transformation are the various traditions that have woven themselves into Christianity:
    - ⤴ Christmas trees (taken from the Scandanavians)
    - ⤴ Easter Eggs (arising out of a 13<sup>th</sup> century custom not to eat eggs during Holy Week)
    - ⤴ German feast of the Vernal Equinox: transformed into the Feast of the Annunciation
      - Similar feast of the Summer Solstice gave us the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist on 24 June – near the longest day of the year
        - ◆ And in recognition that Luke’s gospel states that John was born six months earlier than Jesus (although the Bible does not state that Jesus was born in December)
- ✘ As Christianity assimilated these traditions, Christianity became more homogenized, and this lead to a larger transformation of Christianity as it became the religion of the State,
  - Christianity became a safe means of gaining admission into the mainstream of the society
    - ⤴ As the Church gained position and privilege, great masses of people flocked to the church
      - Not so much because they wanted to dedicate their lives to Jesus, but because it was something one did when one became an adult and had children and wanted to become responsible citizens.

- ✘ But that was not the way that Christianity began,
  - If we are to follow the teachings of Jesus, we will always be in trouble with the authorities.
    - ⤴ We see that in the reading from Acts this morning, with the story of the stoning of the Deacon Stephen:
  - Jesus transcends:
    - ⤴ The rules of the scribes, who manage the tax system
    - ⤴ The priests who managed the rituals and lived hand in glove with the Romans
    - ⤴ The Pharisees, who managed the morality of the people
- ✘ So what makes the Way the Truth and the Life of Jesus different than the Roman rule or the customs of the Scribes and Pharisees,
  - Jesus reveals that in John 13: 34-35, the verses just before today's reading:
    - ⤴ "I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."
- ✘ That is The Way:
  - Not to master but to serve
    - ⤴ Not to kill, but to die
    - ⤴ Not to dominate, but to forgive
  - Not to stone the adulterous woman to death, as she deserved, but to demand that the one who is without sin to cast the first stone
  - Not to demand that the tax collector Zacchaeus (up in the tree) turn his life around and accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior before Jesus would step into his house. But rather to accept Zacchaeus, without pre-conditions.
- ✘ So what should the people who follow The Way look like?
  - They would be the most loving, most compassionate, forgiving, welcoming, and peaceful people on earth, willing to sacrifice all to do justice, just like Jesus.
    - ⤴ Just as Jesus is the incarnation of the God, we, too are supposed to be the incarnation of Jesus in the world.
- ✘ The Gospel of John is the Gospel that proclaims the Incarnation.
  - It starts with the "Word that became flesh and dwelt among us."
    - ⤴ Who humbled himself and entered into creation,
    - ⤴ Who was God's word and work in the world:
      - taking the form of a servant
        - ◆ who touched the untouchables
        - ◆ and spoke sharp truth that exposed those in power.

- ✘ Our faith should be synonymous with the Way, the Truth and the Life
  - But oftentimes we think of our faith as being synonymous with our religion and in terms of the practices of our particular church
  - Jesus always pointed out that religion should be at the service of the WTL and not the other way around.
    - ^ Religious practices should never become an object in themselves.
      - The WTL is the object of religion.
      - It is the WTL that will save us, not our religion.
    - ^ Religion is meant to give expression to the WTL.
      - But once religion becomes more important than the WTL itself, we lose perspective.
      - People then engage in power instead of service.
      - They act out of fear based on a concern for rules and tradition
        - ◆ rather than acting out of the WTL, that is open to all the different ways the Spirit moves in this world.
  - If you ask what Muslims and Christians and Buddhists really believe, they will generally tell you the same.
    - ^ Do not kill. Do not steal. Honor your mother and father. Care for the poor.
      - That is what is really important.
      - We all share a common vision gives life and opportunities for growth, love and respect.
      - The different faith traditions are instruments to keep this common vision strong and life-giving.
- ✘ So how much should we really care about religion?
  - If you help to maintain a room in a homeless shelter, you're following the Way, the Truth, and the Life;
    - ^ And we shouldn't care if you're a Baha'i or a Baptist
  - If you help serve a meal to the hungry at Dinner at the Brick, you're following the Way, the Truth and the Life,
    - ^ And we shouldn't care if you're a follower of Mohammed or Buddha
  - If you sort out clothing at the Red Door, You're following the Way, the Truth and the Life,
    - ^ And we shouldn't care if your favorite theologian is the Hindu Adi Shankara or the Catholic Thomas Aquinas
  - If you support an immigrant Dreamer to attain an education, you're following the Way, the Truth and the Life,

- ^ And we shouldn't care if follow the way of Shinto or the way of Calvin
- ✘ That is not to say that we should give up on Christianity or the Anglican tradition.
  - Our tradition puts expression to our faith; it makes our faith tangible and accessible to us
  - At the same time, all the different religious traditions we follow should inspire us to express the Way , the Truth and the Life in practical ways
  - What is the measure of our faith? (at least in my view):
    - ^ It's how well do we apply our beliefs in ways that actually helps others.
- ✘ What we should really care about is this:
  - Does what =we do in this life participate—in some small way at least—in that radical, that unconditional, that all-encompassing love for ALL people that characterized the life and teaching of Jesus.
  - If we can do that, then we can share—in some small way at least—in the Way, the Truth and the Life.