

The Tao of Jesus - Sermon Based on John 14:1-14
by David Hindman on Sunday, May 22, 2011

Last weekend's William & Mary graduation festivities included Baccalaureate, an interfaith worship celebration. Texts and blessings from Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions were shared. I found myself drawn into the mystical and melodious chanting of the Quran reading and mantras recited as Hindu blessings. I realized I could affirm the readings and pray the blessings. Most of us might think they were from our Bible. It was a beautiful and holy experience as we gathered from various faith perspectives asking blessing on our daughters and sons. It was true worship.

I sat there knowing I would wrestle this week with Jesus' words, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." The truths from last Saturday's worship and today's text's truth seem to rub against each other harshly. What do we do with that?

How do we live in that tension in a world much more diverse than the one our parents or grandparents knew? I was in high school when I met a Roman Catholic my age and my first Jewish classmate. When I was here at R-MC I almost became an Episcopalian and my mother whispered this news to relatives like it was scandalous. Today, Christian denominations don't matter nearly as much as they did in the past; many of us have family

members or close friends who are Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, New Age folks, or some other faith.

Here's the tension where I live – and maybe you do, too. I don't presume to know the mind of God about what the future holds for non-Christians. I know some whose lives and hearts are closer to God than I am. Their compassion and patience and devotion to God put me to shame, but their connection to holiness is through Judaism or Islam or another tradition. I envy the authenticity and depth of life I see in them. So I can't imagine they're destined to an eternity apart from God – they're too much at home with the Divine already. But at the same time I know that for me Jesus has been the true way of life. His ways and life have a hold on me like none other. He is the truth about God and about life for me. I think about God and Jesus comes to mind; I think about Jesus and God always enters the picture, too.

What to do? In a multi-faith world, can I still invite people into a committed and whole-hearted relationship with a particular person and Savior expressed in a particular faith? In a world where Buddha and Muhammad and Moses and Lao-Tzu authentically have connected others to the heart of the universe, why Jesus? What gives him more street cred than those others? Why is following him still worth all we have?

I want to say again before I get run out of church that I am forever in love with the Lord Jesus. The word Tao is Chinese for “way,” and it includes a way of being, living and relating. My heart’s desire is always to be Christ’s follower and walk the Tao of Jesus. I *know* what Jesus says about God is absolutely true. And the life I know is a gift received by way of Christ. I trust Jesus as Lord and Savior because for me the Tao of Jesus is life and peace and joy.

But God’s truth is greater than the small portion I grasp. At the very least, I don’t presume to know God’s plans and ways for others. We Christians believe Jesus is God’s Word come to us in the flesh. *We’ve* heard and seen that Word most clearly in him. But God’s Word is not limited to Jesus. God will not go without a witness anywhere. God works in multiple mysterious ways and is able to make sure that Word is heard beyond the Church’s walls.

We believe Jesus is the Savior of all. That doesn’t mean everyone has to know who’s doing the saving. If our life is saved by a blood transfusion we don’t need to know who the donor is. They can be unknown to us and still give life. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote, “We know that no one can be saved except through Christ; we don’t know that only those who know Him can be saved by Him.” “There’s a wideness is God’s

mercy like the wideness of the sea. For the love of God is broader than the measure of our mind.”

Before the mystery of God’s healing salvation, humility is the only right attitude. Jesus says, “No one comes to the Father but by me.” That means *Jesus* saves: not the church, or having the right beliefs or saying the right things. We are not saved by what we believe or do or by belonging to the right group but by the gracious, merciful love of God we’ve met in Jesus. That love is for all creation. John 3:16 says, “God so loved *the world*, not just the Christians. And if God’s wants to save the whole world, let’s let God do that in whatever way God chooses. Theologian Roberta Bondi grew up in a church that taught her to believe, “Only believe God loves you or he will send you to hell forever.” What an odd god that is. It is not the God I have met in Jesus. That Word of God made flesh came so share life so we might experience life.

“No one comes to the Father except by me.” That sounds like Jesus is the only way for everyone. That’s how I’ve always interpreted it. But this week I saw that the Greek is not so demanding. The subject is singular, not plural. In other words Jesus says, none of you comes to the Father except through me.” He’s talking to the 12 disciples and those who’ve come after. And that’s certainly true – Jesus *is* the way we *Christ followers* connect with

God. But Jesus is not saying he's the only way for all people everywhere at all times. This is the language of lovers, of people committed to each other. It's the language of one saying to another, "You're the only person for me. There's no person in the whole world more beautiful or caring than you." Intellectually we know that's not really true. But in heart language, it is true. Christians speak love language about Jesus and know in our hearts that he truly is the way of life.

And Jesus is the only way to the Father. Not the only way to God, but the only way to the Father we meet in Jesus. Jesus lived a life of such intimacy with God that we can only describe it as the closeness of a father and a son at its best and deepest. And Jesus makes a way for us to have that same close intimacy and depth. He teaches us to call God Abba, Papa, the trusting innocent language a child uses to speak to her dad. Jesus sets before us a way of life trusting that what we see in Jesus is really the face of God. It is a face of extraordinary hospitality, knee-bent humble service, forgiving grace, tender mercy, relentless love, wonderfully kind justice. Christ followers bet their lives this is a true picture of God and believe that Ashland is not the center of the universe, but this God is. Maybe we're wrong. Maybe God is not like what we see in Jesus. But Christ followers risk being

wrong with all our heart and soul and mind. We leap into living and being this way because for us it's truly the only way to live.

Why does it matter? Why choose Jesus? Because if Jesus is the true way to live, if God really is like this, if there is a way in the midst of so many ways, if there really is truth in the midst of so many promises, if there really is life so amazing that it's life with in all CAPS, why wouldn't you open the gift right now?

I love the film, *When Harry Met Sally*. At the movie's end, on New Year's Eve Harry races to find Sally at a party and breathlessly confesses his love for her despite her quirkiness, "I came here tonight because when you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible." That's why it matters. Our beloved Jesus offers us the gift of himself – he is the truth, the way, the life; he is the door to the heart of the God we called Abba, Papa. So why not say yes, and why not say it now.