

*Love is the Way, Love is the Truth, Love is the Life.*  
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels by the Sea  
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I want to take you back to the year 325. Constantine has an empire to run. It's based on order and structure. A part of his order and structure is religion and there was a group – twenty percent of his Empire, maybe thirty percent at that point – were following this crazy guy named Jesus and none of them agreed on anything except for prayer. This was troublesome for him. Constantine pulled all the bishops across the empire to a place called Nicaea.

In Nicaea they were locked in a room; and I'm not making that up they were literally locked in a room a big room like a big ballroom I mean it was comfortable – this is the Empire after all – I mean they were trying to take care of the Bishops; they put them together and Constantine said you will agree on things; you will have order; you'll have structure; that's how it works in my Empire. That is how and where we got the Nicene Creed. It's also where we got the origins of the canonized Bible. The Bishops and the Christian communities had different books and different hierarchies of books. In Nicaea, they canonized list of the books of the Bible – 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. There were books that others wanted in the Old Testament and they did not make it. For the some of you this might be the first time you have heard that the Old Testament could have had more books. They decided on 27 books of the New Testament and they decided on four Gospels; not five, not six, not eighty; but four. This also might be the first time some of you've heard that there were other gospels that are not included in the Bible. They agreed on the four: Matthew Mark Luke and John. The New Testament was put in order and it's based on length. The longest writings, the longest letters the longest works, get placed first and then the shorter get towards the end. Philemon, as a part of the Pastoral letters, is a one-pager; it's perhaps one of the most important that we have but because it's one page, it was put at the end. Revelation has 22 chapters – it's long – but it's at the end for two reasons – it almost didn't make it; there was a group that didn't want it. Secondly, it's at the end because it has to do with The End.

Now as far as order and structure goes, the order of the gospels is not based on length. It should have been Luke then Matthew then John and then Mark, being the shortest, at the end. But they didn't. They put John at the end. Any curiosity as to why? It's because John almost didn't make it. We almost only had three Gospels. There were some big Johannine supporters; and some that thought it wasn't a part of their tradition so they didn't want it; and so they stuck it on at the end. Can you imagine not having John in the New Testament?

The first three gospels, Matthew Mark and Luke, are all syncopated – they all seem to mesh together their timelines, the phrases, they all seem to work together and so they're called a way of synchronizing or we call it, uh, I've now completely forgotten the phrase some of you know it – what is called synoptic; thank you yes; synoptic because it all connects in together. John's gospel which I will call Johannine – the reason why is theologians don't like to put possessives onto the gospel – it was placed at the end because it doesn't fit with the synoptics. But, there is another reason why it's at the end. It has a particular Christology; now if you don't know what Christology means, which is fine, you probably have heard the term biology right; so it's a study of the bio, the study of living things; you've heard of psychology; right the study of

the brain; you've heard of trigonometry which is the course that almost kept me from getting into college; those are all "ology's" they're all things that we can use to study. So, Christology is this is the study of Christ. I would have preferred Jesus-ology but you know they went with Christology. The Johannine Christology is a very particular.

The reason why I started in the year 325, and I've worked my way through this, is that we are going to be in the Johannine gospel for quite a while through May. We're going to hear all sorts of stories of Jesus who is going to say I am the bread, I am the life, you can hear all sorts of I am phrases and things out of John and I want you to hold in the back of your mind that those may not have made it except for the Bishops that argued for John to be in the canonized Bible.

The Johannine gospel and its Christology – if you just understood that phrase congratulations, we're stepping the right direction – I want to walk you through the way that John sees Jesus and I want you to hold in the back of your mind it is not the only way that others who are a part of the faith saw Jesus. This is a particular perspective and gospel that illuminates who Jesus is but that there were others who would see Jesus in a slightly different light. For me my Christology is very similar to the Johannine Christology; it's a very high Christology which means we put Jesus way up, high above other things. John starts with: *In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word is God, the word became incarnate – the word became born in flesh.* Where the other gospel writers talk about the birth of Jesus, or Mark who starts at Jesus' adult baptism, John starts at the beginning of time way back in the beginning with God, there was no beginning before him, that all things were created through him, that's where John starts with Jesus.

The Johannine Jesus has long, long sermons, long explanations of things; it's like a scribe is writing down Jesus's words and then put it into a gospel. The phrase *I am* comes from the Old Testament, it's the way that God refers to the God-self by saying I am and so when we hear Jesus say: I am the Good Shepherd; last week: I am the gate; we hear these things and see a Christology which is God in our presence.

So, if you can somehow get rid of the fundamentalism that has seeped into your mind during the 20th century; if you could let go of the images of Dante and the descending fiery hell scenes that were supported by the medieval Church – but not found in the Bible – if you could let go of all of those images and get yourself back to the year 325. If you could take all of the things that we have piled onto the church and if you can get back to Jesus saying: I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me. If you can take away the things that you have been taught that phrase means and who's in and who's out, if you can let go of that for a moment, I'm going to invite you to do that as we hear the rest of these gospel lessons from John through this month.

In the New Testament, there are three letters that are attributed to John; three pastoral letters; in them John writes about God who is love. The theology is that God is love. Love is God; those who love know God; those that are part of God are a part of love. John is interweaving those things together in the Pastoral letters and so we hear that in the Gospel itself we hear about love. Now is the agape love – for those who like to study and know a little more about Greek there are many different forms of love and this is the agape, sacrificing form of love. This love is not how you feel about puppies, or about ice cream, or about your favorite TV show or maybe I how feel

about the Seattle Seahawks; anyway, that is not that type of love that is agape. This is the love John was talking about: you work hard, you earn money to buy food, you invite your friends and your family over to eat, you clean the house, you prepare the food, you invite them over and serve them. You make sure that they are having a great time and that they're full. When they leave, you clean up and then you think oh I need to eat. I haven't eaten yet. That is the type of love – agape – that John is talking about both in the gospel and the Pastoral letters. John does not see a separation between God and love, God and sacrifice, and so Jesus who took the bread and broke it and gave it to them – this is my body; this is my body that I'm sharing with you – this is agape and it is the love that we are invited into. That is the love that if you know that love, you know God. If you know that love, you have seen God. If you have participated in that type of sacrifice for someone else, then you know God, you have seen God.

When Philip says in today's Gospel lesson: what do you mean – we haven't seen God where is God? Jesus said, you have seen God; when I do these things, the works themselves – the miracles that Jesus did that got him in a load of trouble – those are all sacrifices; those are all acts of love. Jesus says I am the way. Love – agape sacrifice – is the way.

I am the truth. You will hear other things about how you're supposed to live; you will hear how you're supposed to hoard and to take, and to get advantages over others. Jesus says I am the truth. What we are here for is to sacrifice to love one another.

I am the life. Our bodies, psychologically and biologically, our bodies cannot hold resentment or anger. We cannot. It hurts our bodies both psychologically and physically. The life that is taught to us by Jesus is to forgive. To forgive ourselves, to forgive others, to let go of all of those things that we have been carrying. The agape sacrifice is, in part, of our ego that we must sacrifice to let go.

No one comes to the father except through me. No one comes to God through any other means but love. And again, this is not the love of turtles and of dolphins – which I love, they're great, especially manatees. I love those but what I'm talking about is the love that you have for your family, for your friends, that type of love that brings us to sacrifice, to give to, one another; that that's the type of love that brings us to the father.

There's a lot more in this passage. This is the most common passage that we read at memorials and funerals. I never get to talk about the theology of it because we're focused on a loved one who has passed. But today is a Sunday in Easter. So, let look at the second part the second paragraph of today's lesson – we don't use in our in our memorials and in our funerals probably because it is one of the most troubling and difficult phrases; it's one of the stumbling blocks of Christianity. Jesus said: whatever you ask for in my name I will do.

Whatever you ask for in my name I will do. This is one of our stumbling blocks because how many of you like me were young you didn't like the bike that you were given and you said: Jesus I want a new bike. In the morning there was no new bike. In all seriousness, I have prayed for people in Jesus' name and they died anyway. This is one of our stumbling blocks; how do we rectify Jesus saying that and our own experience with prayer? The first way is that John

highlights glorifying God in this passage. You don't see it as much in English as you do in the Greek; he wrote that I will do whatever you ask my name so that the father may be glorified in the son. There's this idea that whatever is glorified in God will be done.

Back to the woman that I prayed for in Jesus name for her not to die and then she did. I have to think that there's some sort of glory in her passing. In my wrestling with God about this, I got the sense that I think the Spirit shared with me that we all have expiration dates. No one is designed to live in these bodies forever. Just like how we can't carry anger, we can't carry resentment, we can't carry those well in our body, we also have expiration dates and that this woman who I love, her expiration date, it was time and that for her, glory was not to be living in a broken down cancer ridden tired out old body; she never ever would want to live that way; the glory is she has been released from that body, from her expiration date, and she has been received. That is the glory of God.

Another way to look at it is this: my friend Father Alex Andujar has said every prayer is answered by God if you accept the answer of no. If you think no is an acceptable answer, it's something that God can tell you, then God answers all prayers. If you think God can answer in the following ways: not yet, not today, hold on, wait, it's not ready yet, not now, that's the wrong person, it's the wrong time; if you think those are acceptable answers in prayer then yes Jesus will answer every single one of our prayers. Jesus doesn't ask us what we want according to our will, he asks us to ask what's in accordance with God's will and with God's glory. So, for those that see this as a stumbling block I just ask you to look at it through that lens.

And the last piece if we can, circle back up to the top.

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.*

Have any of you ever been to New Mexico and have seen a hacienda style home with a big old wall that goes around it. Inside of the hacienda you first see a fountain when you walk in, a place of refreshment, a place to receive water, a hacienda always has a place for worship, there are always plenty of rooms, you've got the whole kitchen area with an outdoor eating and dancing area as well as a formal place to eat. Have you ever seen the pueblos of New Mexico where the indigenous people lived? They would build into the side of a giant cliff. They would put in what we would call condos. When someone got pregnant, they'd build another condo, or dig deeper and make another room. The more families and children the more digging they'd do. At night they would pull the ladder up so the bandits can't come in then in the morning they would put the ladder down so you can go out and run around. Both the Hacienda and the Pueblo is what Jesus was pointing at when he said in my father's house there are many dwelling places. Jesus said: I go to prepare a place for you. I go. This is love, this is sacrifice, this is what God is building and designing for you; so, do not let your hearts be troubled.

I am the way. I am the way of loving and of living and of letting go.

I am the truth. You'll hear a lot of stuff out there about how you should be living but I'm going to tell you this is the way that our bodies were designed – to love and to live and to give and to offer for one another. Follow me and I'm going to show you the way to live. I'm going to show you the way to be in communion, to be in unity, to be in harmony with one another. When Jesus says I am the way and the truth and the life he's inviting us to love one another as God loves us.