

## The Way and the Truth and the Life...

I think I may have mentioned that I started trying to learn basic Greek while at college. It was kind of an encouraged optional extra, advertised as being a good idea to know the language that Jesus taught in and the Gospels were written in.

For those of you who are aware of my limitations as far as English is concerned – never mind Greek – go ahead and have a laugh.

I lasted half a term before bailing and that was because they had started using English terms that I didn't understand; I never even got as far as the Greek! What is a past participle anyway???

Still one of the delights of studying in a renowned college was that there were actual scholars there who could read Greek – ancient Greek – and were happy to join in our biblical debates and discussions over a cup of coffee. One of the things that I picked up, while I listened to these clever people, was how brilliant Jesus was in the use of his language and how English doesn't always quite cut it. We literally 'lose something in the translation'.

Today's Gospel reading is a prime example of that; especially the well-known phrase – 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. So I decided to try and explain something today that I would not be able to do if I was stood at the front of church trying to talk you through it.

John's Gospel is like an ogre, or an onion, or parfait (Come on all you Shrek fans ... it has layers ... sheesh) – You can give it a quick surface reading and come away with a ton of information but if you mine down there is more and more to learn the deeper you go. So let's take a pick and shovel and start digging.

The first two words, for example, are loaded with meaning. On the surface Jesus is simply saying, this is about me; as we might say ... I am a Rhino's fan or, I am a Tiger's fan (had to put it in somewhere right). On the next level Jesus is using the Greek version of God's very name! Powerful stuff! This happens a lot in John's Gospel because John is deliberately making the point about who Jesus is. On the next level we should think about what that name means. I am – I exist – I exist to be. It is a name that describes not only presence but presence with a purpose.

Last week we looked at Jesus describing himself as the gate to the sheepfold and the good shepherd and what they might mean. What Jesus was saying was – I exist to be the good shepherd, I exist to be the gate; we can go on, I exist to be the bread of life, I exist to be the light of the world, and here – I exist to be the way, the truth and the life.

All this from just two simple words! Okay – take a breath and let's keep digging.

The way. This can simply mean the path or the road but it is often used to talk about 'the way of living' or – to use big words – the philosophy of the way you live

your life. Did you know that the early church members used to be called 'Followers of The Way'? They were recognised from the different way they lived from others; from their outlook and their actions.

Jesus is responding to Thomas's question – which I always think is a bit panicked or frustrated – 'How can we know the way?' – And Jesus is saying, walk the path that I walk, do what I do, live how I live. There is action here. We must live like Jesus and be like Jesus, it is another way of saying 'Follow me.'

I'm going to deal with 'the truth' bit last because there is a whole lot going on there – so moving onto life.

Life – not so difficult, to be living. But it is worth knowing that Greek has many words that relate to life and the word that Jesus chooses to use here is the same one that he uses for everlasting life; indeed it is the only word he uses for that. It is the same Greek word that John uses in the opening verses of his Gospel when he speaks of 'life' coming into being through Jesus. So Jesus is saying – 'I exist to be life, eternal life'. That is what we receive from him and through him. He is the source of all life for all creation and not just for the period of time we spend here on Earth, he is the source of life through eternity. Every breath, every heartbeat, every moment is his gift to us.

Now we come to truth and boy this is where our English translations do not do the original words justice! It is not truth as in – I am not lying; this is a far bigger picture and relates, once again, to John's ongoing need for people to see who Jesus is.

The literal meaning of what Jesus said is 'the state of not being hidden', if you like 'to be revealed', and leads directly to the heart of his reply to Philip when he asks to 'see the Father'. (I am here Philip, can you not see me?)

Throughout the Old Testament there is a big deal made of God being 'hidden' from us, he is too amazing, too powerful, too perfect for us to see him without some screen to save us from a presence that would instantly fry our brains and turn us to dust. Jesus is saying that he is God made accessible, the full revelation, no hidden extras and nothing left out. When we look on Jesus we are looking on God; what we see Jesus do, think, say, we are seeing what God would do, think and say.

Put all of that together and what do we get? Something along the lines of Jesus saying – 'I exist to be the example of how to live your lives, to show you what God is really like and to give you everlasting life'. That is a complicated little sentence all on its own but when you start to unpack it ... well it becomes the basis for libraries of heavy books filled with big words in small type.

It is Christianity in a nutshell.