

*Jesus, the Way*  
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What part does Jesus of Nazareth play in our daily life?

—Not just here in worship...in church...but also outside of church...in our daily living?

Having Jesus be a part of my daily life...not just having Jesus be part of a sermon or a Bible study....having Jesus be part of my daily life has been and continues a lifelong struggle for me.

And the writer of the Gospel of John hasn't always helped.... especially when he portrays Jesus as saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

As with many of you, I grew up in a church...attending church regularly, going through a Confirmation Class...being active in the youth group, attending summer camp....a familiar story.

What is Jesus' part in this?

—Well, I was taught that to be a Christian, you have to believe certain things about Jesus: he is the Messiah, only Son of God, Savior, God in human flesh, born of a virgin....I learned that believing these things makes you a Christian...and that continues to be a dominant theme in Christian churches.

There is just one problem with this way of seeing Jesus: that is not...NOT...what Jesus taught and lived.

For example, take this often quoted text.... "I am the way, the truth and the life," often quoted to prove that what you believe about Jesus is the heart of Christian faith.

Let's take a fresh look, beginning with the word, "way."

—The Greek word *odos*, translated "way," can mean a road, a highway.

—It can refer to action: being on the way, on a journey. It is often figurative, "a way of life, a way of acting, conduct."

Early Christians were called "followers of the Way." (Acts 9:2)

The second half of the verse—"no one comes to the Father except through me:" this verse is not saying that only those who believe certain things about Jesus are acceptable to God—even though it is commonly used that way.

—This verse is saying experiencing God happens when people live Jesus' way.

Matthew, Mark and Luke do not portray Jesus as emphasizing beliefs about himself.

--Jesus called people to focus on God and God's purposes, what he terms the "kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven in Matthew)."

--Jesus pointed not to himself, but to God.

What is this "way" of Jesus we are called to follow?

--Jesus confronted others who had built lives based on greed, lives based on domination and status rather than respect and mutuality: he taught and lived a way of justice and mercy.

We look around and see human activities, but Jesus looked at events and people and saw divine activity.

—Jesus lived with a profound awareness of a loving and generous Spirit of God everywhere.

Jesus was compassionate with people he met...he was radically inclusive in his dealings with people rather than excluding those who normally get sidelined by society.

As Annie Lamott wrote, “You can safely assume that you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”

Make no mistake about it: living Jesus’ way is not easy.

--As Mark Twain is said to have remarked, “It is not what I don’t understand in the Bible that troubles me; it is what is perfectly clear that does.”

In Jesus’ parables—his distinctive way of teaching—the focus is always on how to live, how to treat one another.

There is no focus on what you believe as the most important thing. He never says “Go and believe likewise.” He calls people to “go and do likewise.”

He stands in the tradition exemplified by the Hebrew prophet Micah, who lived in tumultuous times 800 years before Jesus.

Micah knows that worship, no matter how glorious, is not the heart of following God’s purposes.

—Instead, as Micah says, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

—What is vital is how we live...with one another, with God.

“I am the way, the truth and the life:” we come to know God most clearly, most deeply, by living the way of Jesus, the truth he taught, the life he lived.

--I don’t know about you, but living Jesus’ way is more than enough challenge for me!

When we wonder about the state of the Christian church, isn't it worth asking whether our problems come from NOT following Jesus' way...people see too little of a transforming way of life when they experience churches.

—Differing from Jesus, people see lots of emphasis on what you believe when they encounter most churches.

Churches are strong when we live the way of Jesus of Nazareth... inviting others to share that way...celebrating God's presence.

--If we have to ask what is at the heart of a congregation's life rather than it being obvious, we have not yet been grasped by Jesus' way, truth and life!

Yes, belief is important...but ONLY if it results in action...if it leads to our living Jesus' way.

—As the writer of James says so well, "...faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

Worship is important, as is the quality of a church's fellowship, its ministries, its form of government—but these are not the heart of church and Christian faith.

Christian faith and life is about following Jesus' way of life.... the way that was—IS—Jesus way, Jesus' truth, Jesus' life.

My experience and witness is this: I come closest to finding wholeness and life abundant...experiencing God....in those moments when I come closest to living Jesus' way, Jesus' truth, Jesus' life.

Amen!

