



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life

SCRIPTURE:
John 14:1-7

February 5, 2023 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

In John 14:6, Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” This is the verse that was quoted to one of my former students when he was being examined on the floor of Foothills Presbytery for ordination. Once you are called to a congregation, the presbytery, the group of pastors and ruling elders, has to vote to approve you.

Rodney had a call to Fort Hill Presbyterian Church in Clemson, South Carolina, and needed to be approved by the presbytery in order to serve there. The Foothills Presbytery is in the northwest corner of South Carolina. During his examination, he stood in front of the presbytery and they were invited to ask him questions. One older gentleman stood up and said to Rodney, “Son, in John 14:6, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, said, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ Do you believe that to be true, son?” And Rodney stood there and said, “Yes, sir. I do.” Then just as the man was sitting down, Rodney made a mistake. He kept talking. He said, “But you know, sir, while I believe that to be true, I also have to acknowledge the total sovereignty of God and it seems to me that if God wants to save someone outside of Jesus Christ, well, God is God and can do whatever God wants.” Then the gentleman, who had not yet sat down, looked at Rodney and said, “What did you just say?”

I learned about this because weeks before, Rodney had invited me to preach at his ordination service and I had put a hold on that date pending his successful examination by the presbytery. He called me and told me that the date I had reserved was now free. I asked him, “What did you do?” He explained that what followed was a long discussion about how people are saved and the presbytery meeting ran out of time so they could not vote to approve Rodney so he now had to wait another three months to be

examined again.

In today’s scripture reading, Jesus is nearing the time of his arrest, torture and crucifixion. He knows that but his disciples still do not understand. They are confused and worried about his language about his time coming and leaving them. He says to them, “Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house, there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” Then he talks some more and surely most of them are thinking: Wait, wasn’t your Dad a poor carpenter from Nazareth? What do you mean? He has a mansion in Nazareth? There are no big houses in Nazareth. It’s a little berg of 300 people. Then Jesus says, “And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Then Thomas speaks up—thank goodness for Thomas—and says, “Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” And Jesus says the sixth ‘I am’ statement. “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Like Rodney, I believe that to be true. I believe with all my heart that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to God except through him. But look at this: Jesus does not say *how* he is the way, the truth and the life—only that he *is* the way, the truth and the life. He does not describe *how* we come to the Father; only that the way to get to God is through him. That means I can hold to the truth that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and that the only way to God is through Jesus, *and* I can also hold to the truth that *how* we come to God is entirely up to God.

So could a person of little faith come to God through Jesus? Yes, because that’s up to God. Could a person of a different faith come to God through Jesus? Yes, because that is up to God. Could a person of

no faith come to God through Jesus? Yes, because that is up to God. Could a person come to God through Jesus and have no idea they are coming to God through Jesus? Yes, because that is up to God. God is the one who saves through Jesus. That is not up to us.

Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works so that no one may boast.” Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to God except through him. But *how* that happens is up to God.

When I was in high school, I would sit at lunch with one of my friends, Joe, who was a strong evangelical Christian. He would bring his Bible to lunch so we could read verses together and argue over them. When he was opening his Bible, I noted these stick figures on the inside front cover. I asked them what they were and Joe explained that each one represented a person that (listen to his language) “I had saved.” He showed me one stick figure that was half a person and said that was me. He was still working on me. I smiled and told Joe, “I don’t think you have that much power.” Salvation is a gift of God and is therefore up to God.

Victory Bible Camp is about an hour or so north of Anchorage. I was there to speak at a youth retreat for the Presbyterian churches in Anchorage and Fairbanks and the north slope. It is a beautiful place. We were using the camp for the weekend. Now ‘victory’ is a great word. ‘Bible’ is a great word. ‘Camp’ is a great word. But put them all together and it makes some people nervous. I learned when I arrived that the owners of the camp had quizzed our leaders ahead of time to be sure they were going to speak from the Bible. So I was not surprised when I met the nice couple who owned and ran the camp that they asked me about my background. I told them where I grew up and where I went to seminary. They still seemed uncertain. They sat in the back of the large meeting room and listened intently during my first and second keynote presentations. They sat in the corner together with their arms crossed. After the morning session, they came up to me and were very complimentary on the way I talked with the young people

and what I said. They both said they were a bit surprised because I talked a lot about Jesus and they had assumed that the Presbyterian church didn’t believe in Jesus and I smiled and assured them that we do... just in different ways.

Then they asked me the question. “So, when were you saved?” I smiled and told them earnestly that growing up in my home with two amazing parents, there was never a moment when I did not know and believe that Jesus Christ was my Lord and Savior. They said, “Yes, fine. But when were you saved?” And I said, “Well, if you are looking for a specific time, I guess it would be at the end of my confirmation, when I stood up in the front of the whole church and my Dad, the pastor, asked us, ‘Who is your Lord and Savior?’ and I said, ‘Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.’” They looked at me incredulous and said, “Well, that’s not good enough.” And they turned around and walked away.

When I told this story to one of my friends who is a pastor serving in upstate New York, she said that whenever she is asked the question, “When were you saved?” She answers, “The moment Jesus Christ died on the cross. That’s when I was saved.” Another friend of mine serves the First Presbyterian Church of Albuquerque. He answers by saying that “by the grace of God, I am being saved moment by moment.” For him, salvation is not a single moment but an ongoing process. I love that.

Listen, friends, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to God except through him but *how* that happens is up to God because God is the one who saves because salvation alone belongs to God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. And because that is true, no one, no human being on the face of the earth, ever has the right to say to you that your faith is not good enough!

Jesus said: I am the bread of life. The light of the world. The gate for the sheep. The good shepherd. The resurrection and the life. The way, the truth and the life. Thanks be to God!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.