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CHURCH

John 14:1-11
I Am
The Way, The Truth and The Life

Rev. Brian North
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We're continuing our series on the "I am" statements of Jesus Christ. In each of these metaphorical statements he shares who He is. It's like looking at a diamond and all its different facets...taking a look at it from different angles. So today we continue that...but before we do, let's pray...

I once came across a definition of "a leader" that I think is pretty good. It goes like this: **"A leader is someone who knows the way, who shows the way, and who goes the way."** That's a pretty good definition and I think most of the leaders I respect really seem to live this out. They know the way to go. But they don't keep that knowledge to themselves: They share it with others and show them the way to go. But good leaders go another step: they don't just tell people or show people the way to go, they go that way as well. They walk the talk. So I've always thought this was a good synopsis of leadership.

But as good as this definition is, it's not good enough for Jesus Christ. He takes it a step further. **Jesus doesn't just know, show, and go the way, though he does those things: He says in this morning's text that he is the way.** So, what does he mean by this? It's actually kind of an odd statement, and sounds like something a selfish star athlete might say about himself and his role on a team trying to win a championship. And so if you don't know much about Jesus, it might come across a little narcissistic or self-absorbed, which is completely the opposite of who Jesus is. Jesus is completely giving to others, including you and me.

So as we get into the passage, I want to ask you, **"Who or what is leading you, and where are they leading you?"** I heard another quote on leadership just this week, from a High Schooler. He mentioned that he looks for three qualities in a good leader: That they lead, that they give direction, and that they lead in the right direction. 😊 So who or what is leading you, and where are they leading you? Are they leading you in the right direction? Are they leading in truth? Are they leading in a way that brings life? Something or someone is leading each of our lives. Each of us is influenced by people, and

ideas and ideals. In fact, there probably are a variety of sources of leadership in our lives. But whoever is leading us better be able to know, show, and go the way. And if what is leading us actually *is* the way, then I suggest to you that that is even better.

The setting for this is the Passover meal, shortly before Jesus' arrest. In the course of the conversation just prior to this, Jesus had let his disciples know that he would be leaving them, and that they couldn't follow where he was going just yet, but that they would follow later. The idea that they could not follow Jesus immediately to where he was going was very upsetting to them. They wanted to be with Jesus. The relationship they had with him was important to them, and they didn't want it to end. As a result, their hearts were troubled.

In the face of their concern, Jesus says, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1)**. There are a lot of people today with troubled hearts. Kate Spade had a troubled heart, and sadly, whatever it was that troubled her so deeply led to her suicide this past week. Anthony Bourdain did the same a couple days later. Those are pretty extreme cases of a troubled heart (plus perhaps personality disorders, etc.), and if yours is that troubled I pray that you will talk to someone about that. You need Jesus...but you also need to talk with some truthfully about how troubled your heart is.

But we all have troubled hearts at some level during certain seasons of life. Maybe your heart this morning is troubled about something. Natural disasters that wreak havoc in people's lives; a marriage that is lacking communication and seems to be growing further apart rather than closer together; a report from the doctor that the test results don't paint a very healthy picture; kids that are about to get released from school and you have no idea what to do with them this summer. 😊 Some parents have a serious “deer in the headlights” look about them right now. Maybe some of us even have troubled hearts because of our relationship with Jesus, just as the disciples were here.

But when our hearts are troubled, Jesus says to believe in him. The word for “believe” is “pistuo” And “pistuo” doesn't mean a whimsical, wishy-

washy kind of belief – like belief in the tooth fairy or the very tentative and hesitant belief that the Mariners may actually have a good season. “Pistuo” has more of a sense of “trust” or “have confidence in.” In fact, some English translations read, “Trust in God; trust also in me.”

Jesus is saying here that he is trustworthy, as a leader ought to be. He’s different than a lot of people or ideals that would seek to lead us, because not everyone who’s in positions of leadership is trustworthy. We see people in positions of leadership who aren’t trustworthy – for a variety of reasons – all the time, unfortunately: corporate leaders, political leaders, religious leaders, school leaders, and more. It might make us want to not let anyone lead us in any way, shape, or form ever again for fear of them letting us down or leading us astray. But Jesus is trustworthy. He’s worthy of leading you. He has a solid track record. The disciples started to question that when Jesus said he’d be leaving them. But Jesus assures them, and us, not to worry. We can trust in Him. He knows where he’s going, he knows what he’s doing, and we can let him lead us.

He continues on to explain that he is trustworthy, not just here and now, but also for the long haul. He continues on to say, **“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”** (John 14:2-4).

Jesus is clearly saying that he will come back for those who are faithful to him, and lead them to their true and final home. So even though he’s leaving them, it’s only for a time. He won’t forget them. He will remember them, and in fact a place is being prepared for them that Jesus will lead them to.

Now, some people love to speculate on when Jesus will return. Some claim to have it figured out. But we don’t know when Jesus is going to return. No one does. **Jesus says in Matthew 24:36 that the time of his return will be unknown to us. In fact, he says there that even *He* doesn’t know.** Only His Heavenly Father knows the time. If Jesus doesn’t know – at least as he stood there talking with the disciples in that moment – why on earth would

we think we could possibly know when he will return? So while some people like to make big predictions about when Jesus is returning...that they've unlocked some secret in the Bible that reveals the precise date and time...and tell us that Jesus is returning right now...no, right now. ☺ While some people do that, most people just don't go there, because Jesus himself says we don't know. So we *expect* Jesus to return, but we don't *predict* when.

But even if *when* Jesus returns is uncertain, what isn't uncertain is that he *will* return and that Jesus is preparing a place for those who trust in him. And because of his ultimate triumph over death, there's good reason to believe that he's completely sincere in saying this. Jesus Christ prepares a place in his Father's house – which is clearly a metaphor for eternity with God – he prepares a place there for those who trust in him, and he will lead you there, if you'll let him be the leader of your life.

Then Thomas pipes up, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” And Jesus answers, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:5-6).**

This is arguably the biggest claim Jesus makes to his leadership in our lives if we'll let him in. He doesn't just know and show and go the way. By his very own words, He IS the way. It is also arguably the most controversial statement he ever made. A lot of people resist Jesus because of this statement, and others like it, that teach us that He is the way to eternal life. Interestingly, many people who do not follow Jesus think that this idea of Jesus being the way, is *our* idea...that it's the church's idea pushed on Jesus, and not Jesus' own idea. I don't know why the Church would do that, quite frankly. It would be nice if Jesus had said something else – like “I'm one of many ways, many truths, many lives.” If anything, the church should be motivated to show Jesus as teaching that it doesn't matter what you believe. That sure would make life a lot easier, right? So even if this is one of Jesus' most famous statements, it's also one of his most challenging ones. But Jesus is clear: He is the way, the truth and the life, and you can't get off track when you're following Him.

That's why in churches like this one, it's all “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” Jesus

makes the difference. Jesus does matter. Jesus is the Way...He is the Truth, He is the Life.

Now, if you aren't totally sure about that and you have some questions... then Philip is your buddy, because Jesus' statements aren't enough for him to trust Jesus to the level to which Jesus is inviting his disciples to do. In verse 8, Philip says to him, **“Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us” (John 14:8)**. Thomas is known as “doubting” Thomas (just before – how can we know the way), but Phillip is right there with him. This week, my youngest son, Elliott, and I were looking at the Major League Baseball standings. With the Mariners in first, we took a look at that, and then at the other divisions, too. So Elliott was asking me about the nicknames of a couple teams as he looked at the standings with me, where only the city of each team was listed. He saw San Diego, and he asked, “What’s their team called?” And I said, “The Padres.” And he looked at me and immediately said (with a rather quizzical look on his face/tone of voice), “The Daddies? That’s silly.” I’m like, “Well...I’d never quite thought of it like that, but yeah, I guess that’s what it means!” We see here that Phillip is a first century fan of the Padre...he just wants to see the Father. “Show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” This statement cracks me up. It’s like one of my kids casually asking me, as if this is a normal, every day thing: “Hey padre, can we stop by the auto dealership and pick up a Lamborghini?” As if it’s just *that* simple. So Philip wants more evidence than what Jesus has given thus far. He’s not quite ready to step out in faith. And some of us here this morning are probably in a similar place. We’re not so sure if Jesus really is as trustworthy as He claims.

So Jesus responds to him, and basically says, “You’ve been with me for all this time, and you don’t realize that if you’ve seen me, you have essentially, seen the Father? Don’t you realize how close the Father and I are? Don’t the miracles and the things I’ve done inspire you to trust?” **Jesus is trying to assure him, and any of the other disciples who might resonate with Philip’s request, that he really is sufficient.** That He is trustworthy...that if we want to see God our heavenly Father, our Creator, the King of the Universe, the one who stands beyond time and space and reigns for all eternity, if we want to live with Him in eternity: then Jesus can lead us into

His presence. Jesus has the keys to the Kingdom, and will lead us into the Father's house...if we would only trust Him and follow Him.

How many of you have ever gotten lost trying to find your way somewhere? Raise your hands. Ok, some of you don't have your hands up, and I'm sure you're lying. And in church, no less! And don't tell me you never get lost because of GPS...because you didn't have that probably 10 years ago or so. Well, I have gotten lost...it is significantly less frequently now thanks to modern technology, but I have definitely gotten lost in my life. And when it happens, I'm your stereotypical guy: I'm really bad about asking for directions from someone. But there's a reason why I don't stop to ask directions, and maybe you've experienced this too: Sometimes (I can distinctly remember two instances of this) when I do finally stop and ask for help, many people aren't very helpful. I've stopped and asked people for directions somewhere, and even though they live and work in the area where I'm lost, and I know I'm close to my destination, and I would think they'd know where the place is I'm looking for...they look at me like I'm from Mars. Have you ever experienced something like that?

That's not how Jesus operates. **In Christ Jesus, we see God come to us in the flesh as the Son of God, and that's why he is the way, the truth, and the life.** He doesn't just teach those things to us, he guides us along the way as we follow him and trust him because he is those things. He doesn't just give directions...he is the directions. He doesn't just point out where to go, send us on our way, and say "Good luck with that!" He goes with us on the journey. He himself leads us out of the darkness and into the light – because He is the light of the world. He is the shepherd who goes with the sheep.

Maybe you are here this morning and you're trying to find your way in this world: maybe looking for some stable direction in this life and some hope about life beyond this world. Maybe your heart is really troubled and you're looking to navigate your way through it and find some meaning in the midst of it and some light in the midst of the dark valley you're in. Jesus says He is the one you need, because he is the way. He can lead you out of the shadows and into the light. I'm a testimony to that. If my friends from college who also know me well now were to stand here and describe to you what I was

like 25 years ago when I didn't allow Jesus to lead me, the person they would describe would be radically different than the person you know as pastor of this church. You wouldn't recognize me – partly because I had more hair and it was all blonde – but also because of who I was at a deeper level. I'd grown up in the church...I knew who Jesus was...but I wasn't really following Him. And you certainly wouldn't want me pastoring this church. Of course, there are some of you who probably still question how on earth it is that I'm a pastor. Sometimes even I wonder. But trust me, 25 years ago, Jesus Christ was not leading my life. I wasn't letting him. I wasn't trusting Him. I wasn't believing Him. I was definitely with Phillip, not sure about Jesus and instead, other things were leading me. But there was a faint path of faith, and I didn't lose complete sight of Jesus. And over the course of a couple year stretch just after college that was particularly transformative, Jesus ended up as the leader in my life. And I am so, so grateful for that. And it can be the same for you.

So I want to encourage you to: Keep seeking after Jesus. Keep listening to Him. Keep following Him, even if it's at a distance, even if it's tentative, even if you wander off occasionally and follow someone or something else for a time...**Jesus will keep welcoming you back and inviting you to follow Him and stick closely to Him.**

Why does he do that, and why should you keep following, even if it's at a distance? Because Jesus is the way, and he wants you to know and follow the way. Because Jesus Christ really matters. He doesn't just know the way, show the way, and go the way. He is the way – through the cross and his empty tomb. No one comes to the Father except through him, and he invites you to follow his lead, today. Let's pray...Amen.