INTRODUCTION

When GPS technology first came out and some people started having it in their cars, it seemed like a rather unnecessary expense to me. Who needs a computerized voice telling you to turn right or left when a paper map will probably do better? If I didn't have a purchased map, I could always download and print a Mapquest map from the internet before I headed out on my journey. I suspect I would have stuck to my opinions about that as long as GPS was something for which I had to pay extra money. But when I got a new cell phone last spring that had Google maps already built into its features, I have to say that I quickly came to appreciate that readily-available technology. This summer when I went on vacation in the Northwest and then on a couple of out-of-state continuing education trips to San Francisco and Chicago, the maps feature was wonderful. When you're in unknown territory, it's nice to know the way to go.

If mapping technology had been available in the first century, disciple Philip probably would have tried to use it. Fortunately, though, he had Jesus to answer his question about where they were going. "Don't worry," said Jesus. "I'll show you. If you stick with me, you won't get lost." That promise is still true for us today. Let's dig into this story from John chapter 14 and see what Jesus meant when he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

1. THE WAY OF LIFE

We begin with the fact that the way of Jesus is a way of life. When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," here in chapter 14, he was referring back to the events of John chapter 11 and Jesus' statement, "I am the resurrection and the life." Jesus made that "I am"
statement as he wept over his friend Lazarus and then raised him from the dead. In that story, Jesus restored Lazarus to physical life; he inspired sisters Martha and Mary with new spiritual life; and Jesus comforted all of us with the hope of eternal life.

That same message of life is present at the beginning of John chapter 14. Here we see Jesus preparing his disciples for the grief they will inevitably feel at his coming death. "Don't let your hearts be troubled," Jesus tells them. "Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you . . . I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am."

This way of Jesus gives us blessed assurance for the time after death. Yes, death will eventually lay our bodies low. But we who have eternal life can rise above the suffering and pain, knowing that God will never leave us or forsake us. We who have eternal life can rise above the worry and fear, knowing that we will never be alone. Where we are going is the ample place where God lives, where Jesus has already been preparing for us, where Jesus will take our hand and lead us. No matter how diminished our physical frame becomes, we have the peace of knowing that there will be life beyond the grave.

While it is a common and correct interpretation to think that Jesus was talking about the way to heavenly life after we die, Jesus was also talking about the way of life that starts now while we still have our feet firmly planted on this earth. In the Gospel of John, "eternal life" is a quality of existence, as much as a period of time. That quality of life begins as soon as we believe and continues non-stop. So the very same strength that comes to us as we face death is available to us as we face any number of smaller challenges during the course of daily life. Living the Jesus way means we have the confidence to face our problems head on. We don't
have to run and hide. We don't have to detour around in fear. We can go forward believing that God has a plan. If we follow Jesus, there will be a way even in this life.

2. **THE WAY OF TRUTH**

The way of Jesus is also the way of truth. By saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus was referring to the truth of his relationship with God the Father and the relationship Jesus believed his followers could also have with God. Many of Jesus' first-century peers thought he overstated his relationship with God. And I would dare say that Jesus' detractors think the same thing today. All that "I am" talk is pretty hard to absorb. How could one human being be God in the world? How could one limited flesh and blood person represent all that God is? How could someone who lived for only 33 years be the God who was and is and always will be? And, even harder, how could that one person say, as in John 14:6, "No one comes to the Father except through me"?

Those are some big questions, alright. But, you know what? I think we sometimes make this harder than it has to be. The truth Jesus was trying to tell is that he was in a close enough relationship with God that Jesus gave his followers an opening to see God. The power and values of God the Father were revealed in and through the ministries of Jesus the Son. That's what all the "I am" sayings were about. They were glimpses of God. Through Jesus, we can't see all of who God is, but we are able to see a lot. We are able to see that God is the bread of life, God is the light of the world, God is the gate, God is the good shepherd, and God is the resurrection and the life. Through Jesus, we are able to hear lessons taught, see miracles worked, and observe people loved. That's the truth that Jesus was trying to tell Philip. God was not distant and unknowable. God was right there at work in and through Jesus. Because the
disciples knew Jesus, they were already living in relationship with God. Because they had faith in Jesus, they were already living in the way of truth.

Those of us who are Christians find a lot of strength in John 14:6, where Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." But when we read the second half of that verse, where Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father but by me," we worry about what that means for other world religions. Is it true that Jesus is the only way to salvation? Is it true that Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other people of faith are all doomed to hell because they don't believe in Jesus? Most of us aren't comfortable with that kind of condemnation.

I think we can resolve this problem by remembering that the way of Jesus is the way of life. Jesus wasn't an arrogant guy, who claimed superiority over others. In John chapter 13, Jesus bowed down as a humble servant and washed his disciples' feet. At that last supper, Jesus taught his disciples that they were to love one another. So it doesn't seem to me that the way and truth of Jesus can be about eternal damnation for people who have never had much chance to accept the beliefs of Christian faith. Instead, it seems to me that the truth of Jesus has to be about life and life-giving relationships with God and each other. A religion that promotes prejudice, abuse, and violence is probably not going to pass the Jesus truth test. But any religion that is life giving probably is a Jesus kind of faith. When a person conscientiously practices a life-giving faith, then that person comes into relationship with God. And that's the Jesus way of truth.

**CONCLUSION**

During the summer between my freshman and sophomore years in college, I served on a student ministry team in Detroit. Our four-member college student group worked with a pastor to try to raise up an African American congregation to worship in what had previously been a white neighborhood and church. As we did our ministry there in that summer of 1979, we
knocked on doors and followed any and every lead to try to let people know about the Savior who could help them straighten up their lives and give them new hope and direction.

In addition to my other duties that summer, I also tried singing in the church choir. That was an experience for me. Coordination doesn't come naturally to me, and that black gospel choir was constantly moving to the beat--swaying this way and that way. I readily admit that a couple months wasn't long enough for me to get the groove of their African American rhythm.

But one of the songs that we sang that summer did embed itself in my memory. The song was written by Andre Crouch, and it goes like this:

Jesus is the answer for the world today.
Above him there's no other; Jesus is the way.
If you have some questions
In the corners of your mind,
Traces of discouragement,
The peace you cannot find,
Reflections of your past,
Seem to face you every day,
But this one thing I do know,
That Jesus is the way.
Jesus is the answer for the world today.
Above him there's no other; Jesus is the way.*

Jesus is the way because the truth of his way puts us in a life-giving relationship with God and each other. That's what Jesus meant when he said, I am the way, the truth, and the life."

*To hear Andre Crouch and choir sing this song, go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whjZTug_O-Y