

“The Uniting Way, the Convenient Truth, and the Best Life”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 7, 2023 - Fifth Sunday of Easter

[Acts 7:55-60; John 14:1-14](#)

Who are you? Who is Jesus? Who are you as a follower of Jesus? These questions for consideration, like those posed earlier by our Stewardship Board, require more than a second's thought to answer. In fact, we seek answers to these questions over the course of our lifetimes, and as our identities change over the course of our lives, and our relationships to Christ and specific roles as Christ's disciples change over the course of our lives, our understanding of who we are, who Jesus is, and what it means to follow Christ is never static, but is always evolving.

Fortunately, on our journey of discovering our identity over the course of our lives, we are given by God the gift of guides that can help us in our ever-evolving life-long quest to understand ourselves. The good words of the Good Book, of course, were written for us and previous generations to be such a guide. And the readings we are focusing on this morning, in particular, can help us in our consideration and reconsideration of our identities.

In our gospel reading from John, which is part of what is known as the “Farewell Discourse” of Jesus, a four-chapter-long lesson that Jesus offered to his disciples as they shared their last supper with him, Jesus seeks to help his disciples understand his unique identity as he exclaims to them, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (14:6). This exclamation is one of seven sayings in the gospel of John known as the “I am” statements, a couple of which are tied to miraculous signs performed by Jesus, in which Jesus' unique identity is revealed. Jesus offered this statement after miraculously feeding a great crowd of 5,000 with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish: “I am the Bread of Life” (6:35). And after calling forth his friend Lazarus from his tomb, Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (11:25). As we heard in last week's lesson from John, Jesus also exclaimed, “I am the Gate for the sheep” (10:7) and “I am the Good Shepherd” (10:11, 14). Elsewhere in the gospel, Jesus says, “I am the Light of the World” (8:12) and “I am the True Vine” (15:1).

All of these statements, offered to us not in the Aramaic that Jesus spoke, but in the Greek language used by the gospel writer, echo a previous statement of God as written in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, which was likely the most well-known version of these writings among the first century audience of John's gospel. In Exodus 3, when Moses was speaking with God in the form of a burning bush, after God had just commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh to demand that the enslaved Israelites be released, Moses asks for the name of God to be revealed, so that Moses could tell the Israelites who sent him. God replies that God's name is "I AM" (Exodus 3:14), or *egō eimi* in Greek, the same unique construction Jesus uses in his statements about himself. Those first hearers of John's gospel, mostly Jewish, Greek-speaking followers of Jesus, likely would have identified instantly that when Jesus was saying, "I am the Light of the World" and "I am the Good Shepherd," he was echoing the words of God from the burning bush and his divine identity was being revealed.

In telling his disciples "I am the Way, the Truth, the Life," he reveals more than just his divine identity, but theirs as well. Above all, they were to follow him, the Way; his divine ways were to be their own way. They were to embrace him, the Truth, and his truth as their truth. They were to claim him, the Life, as the source and sustainer of their own lives and their guide for living.

Our first reading from Acts about the killing of Stephen tells us about a follower of Christ who did exactly that. He made Christ his way, truth, and life, and his own sacrifice for the cause of faithfully witnessing to Christ's life echoed in several ways Jesus' own sacrifice on the cross.

Now I hope that none of our lives are ended violently because of our faith as Stephen's was, but I hope that we can all follow his example of faithfully following the Way, Truth, and Life, no matter the cost.

I hope that our lives, like Stephen's, can echo Jesus' life. I hope that we can all claim, above all other aspects of our being, that we are followers of the one who reveals God and God's ways as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I hope that our ways can be like Jesus' way, a uniting way, that brings people together, gathering to be fed and healed, and then to feed bodies and heal spirits. I hope that his truth would be a convenient truth, one broadcast near and wide, revealed and made easily accessible to all, and also buried deep within the private places of our

own hearts, giving ready direction for our private thoughts and aspirations. And I hope that Christ's life, which is the best life, would always be central to our own discoveries of identity and meaning as we travel through life as Christ's disciples.

Whoever you are today, I hope for you to become more like Christ. I hope this for myself. And I hope this for the life we share as a family of faith. Amen.