

Easter 5—Year C
Acts 11:1-8
Psalm 148
Revelation 21:1-6
John 13:31-35

When you hear, “**Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life,**” how do you hear that? What words come to mind? (pause) Is it a *narrow* way? An *exclusive* way? A *who-belongs-to-the-way-and-who-doesn't* way? An “*us and them*” way? Do you *pull back* and want nothing to do with such a thought, OR does your *heart open* and *widen* and *expand*?

When we hear “**Jesus is the way,**” for many of us, we immediately jump to all the *people of good faith who don't follow Jesus* and what about *them*? Is *their* way *not* valid? And then, that colors and pulls this beautiful sentiment of **Jesus being the way, and the truth, and the life** out of its context. As is so true with all of scripture, if you *just look at one line*, you can go way bad wrong. But if we *look at the entirety of scripture*, if we *look at the whole of Jesus' life*, then we're going to end up in a quite different place.

Today is a perfect example. The **Collect** sets the tone with praying to “**know Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life.**”

And then, we move right into the **11th chapter of Acts**, and any notion that this following Jesus stuff is meant to be *exclusive* and *set* and *unchanging* and *rigid* is out the window. The **Judea apostles and believers had heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God**—oh, the horror! So, when **Peter gets back to Jerusalem**, it was open season on Peter. **The circumcised believers criticized him, saying, “Why did you go to the uncircumcised men and eat with them? Don't you know, Peter, “they” are not us, they're not pure like us, and eating with them? Well, what don't you just throw all of our standards completely out the window. What will become of us if we bend our norms here? What will happen if we back off and let go of the traditions that have shaped our identity?”**

“**Then, Peter began to explain it to them, step by step.**” Peter *didn't get defensive*; he *didn't back down*; he *didn't shout at them*, *didn't pull out his charts and facts*; **Peter knew what he knew**, and frankly, it **surprised him** as much as it did the **Jerusalem crowd**. Peter **couldn't dismiss the experience he'd had**, and *he understood*, with great wisdom, that *others who had not had the experience he'd had couldn't just jump on board and get with the program*, so **he walked them through the experience, step by step**. And in good civil discourse fashion, he **stayed firmly anchored in “I” statements**. *He told them his story from his perspective*; you can argue facts till the cows come home, but *it's really hard to argue with first person experience*.

Here's what Peter said: “**I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me.**” Peter then describes **looking at it closely and seeing those four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air**. He then talks about **hearing a voice that said to him, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’** But Peter goes on to tell his listeners,

“but I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’” And Peter describes how that voice didn’t give up, but spoke “a second time, saying, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’”

Peter then relays a really interesting detail, he tells his critics, “**This happened three times, then everything was pulled up again to heaven.**” Okay, does that mean *the voice came a third time telling Peter one more time to eat these things he considered profane or unclean* OR is this *whole scenario repeated three times—God telling Peter to eat these animals, Peter resisting because he considers them profane and unclean, God telling Peter in no uncertain terms that what God has made clean, he must not call profane. Peter not getting it and having to go through this whole dialogue again. Peter still not getting it and having to go through this whole dialogue again.* “**Three times this happened,**” Peter tells us—the text isn’t clear *what* happened three times—but *either way, God stays after Peter until Peter can see as God sees, until Peter can see that what God makes clean, we don’t get to call profane.*

This is **THE principle of change and evolution and expanding hearts and minds.** This is how we came to think that *slavery should end* and that *women could be priests*; this is how we came to *welcome LGBTQ+ folk into full life of the Church.* This is **THE principle of metanoia, repentance,** that keeps us humble and keeps us tuned to the Spirit; that let’s God be God and admits, as Paul says so beautifully in I Corinthians 13, “**Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.**”

This side of heaven, we just don’t know so many things, and it’s crazy to think we’ve got a lock on who’s in and who’s out. We have to be listening, always, for *where God is expanding the boundary, moving the outer limit of grace and love and acceptance* because it’s always going to be *a whole lot further out than where we think it ought to be.*

Peter goes on: “**At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us.**” “*Not to make a distinction between them and us*”—what powerful words. Peter’s mind was blown—*all those distinctions* he’d been taught so carefully to make; *all those ways of separating out holy and unholy—done away with—*“**one Lord, one body, one blood, one God and Father of all.**” We proclaim it every baptism. *Distinctions aren’t our business—realizing and claiming our connection is.*

Peter and six of the brothers, who now stood beside him in Jerusalem, entered the man’s house, and that man relayed how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ Well that took a *leap of faith* for that man to heed the angel and send for Peter.

Peter then appeals to his critics’ own experience and tells them, “**As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with**

the Holy Spirit.”

And having **anchored his critics in their own spiritual experience**, having invited *them* to **remember** that moment when the veil fell away for *them* and *they* knew the power and beauty and love and grace of God, having anchored *them* in that moment that changed *their* lives, he lays out the *only defense we ever have*, “If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?”

“Who was I that could hinder God?” ALL distinctions, ALL claims to exclusivity, ALL claims of the ego to play God and determine who’s in and who’s out, ALL turned to dust sitting in a heap on the floor. God will be God, and we’re not God. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the spring of the water of life, the One who makes all things new. God is always on the move pushing out the limits of love, breaking down the walls that keep us from one another, drawing us ever more deeply into communion with God and all of creation.

Well, when the critics heard this, they were **convicted, in their core**—the text tells us: “When they heard this, they were silenced.” And *after the silence, after the silence*—they had **two ways they could go**: *One, retrench, double-down on their distinctions, strengthen their claim to their righteous cause, paint their differences with bolder colors, draw their line in the sand OR two, let go, surrender to the mystery of God, recognize their kinship with those “others” and speak only praise.* They chose #2: **And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”** His *critics knew*, in their souls, that **we’re all in this together.**

Such is **the mark of those who follow Jesus**, and of all the things **Jesus needed and wanted to say to his disciples in that last supper they shared together the night before he died**, it was this: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Our discipleship has to **carry the scent of love, always**. People will know we’re disciples by *how we love one another*. The journey of the **Christian community, the Church**, has always been to *realize* just how **big and vast and expansive** all those “*one another’s*” need to be. The **earliest followers of Jesus**, so steeped in their **Jewish identity**, had to include the **Gentiles**, even though their *Gentile ways seemed so unclean*. **GOD DIDN’T SEE THEM AS UNCLEAR; GOD SAW THEM AS HOLY.**

And down through the ages, **all those we have deemed unclean**: *women, people of other races, people of other faiths, expressions of gender and sexuality that we don’t understand*; **all those we have considered profane, not holy**, God keeps coming to us with a voice from heaven, **not once, not twice, but three times, or six times, or as many times as it takes UNTIL** we can get it through our thick heads that **what God has made clean, we must not call profane** because what God creates, what God makes, God has declared “good.” *The problem isn’t on God’s side; it’s always on ours.*

This doesn’t mean we don’t make distinctions; we do, but *where the boundaries lie are never*

where we think they're going to be. Love, mercy, grace, compassion—these will always be the stakes that mark out the way, and the truth, and the life that is the way of Jesus.

And so, we come full circle. **Coming to know Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life isn't narrow at all**—in fact, *narrow and wide is the wrong plane altogether.*

Jesus' way, Jesus' truth, Jesus' life is designed to shatter all the *distinctions* our egos want to make until we can bow and bend our knee, recognizing our *kinship* with all those in whom God has made God's home, our *kinship* with all those upon whom the Spirit has fallen, our *kinship* with all those deemed holy by virtue of the divine breath they breath and the divine image they bear, *revealed* in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Word made flesh.

Jesus' way, and truth, and life SHATTERS us, and silences us, and makes us new, UNTIL our only response is praise and overflowing joy in the LOVE we share.

If it's not of love, it's not of Jesus or his way. It's *not* the narrow gate at all, but **THIS is the entrance into eternity itself**, and it blows our oh-so-human minds.

Next time *you are tempted* to **make a *distinction* between “us and them,”** let Peter's testimony rise up before you, keep your own ear tuned to that voice that is speaking from heaven, and surrender to the way of LOVE that makes all things new. Amen.

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Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The First Lesson

Acts 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

The Response

Psalm 148

Laudate Dominum

1 Hallelujah!

Praise the Lord from the heavens; *
praise him in the heights.

- 2 Praise him, all you angels of his; *
praise him, all his host.
- 3 Praise him, sun and moon; *
praise him, all you shining stars.
- 4 Praise him, heaven of heavens, *
and you waters above the heavens.
- 5 Let them praise the Name of the Lord; *
for he commanded, and they were created.
- 6 He made them stand fast for ever and ever; *
he gave them a law which shall not pass away.
- 7 Praise the Lord from the earth, *
you sea-monsters and all deeps;
- 8 Fire and hail, snow and fog, *
tempestuous wind, doing his will;
- 9 Mountains and all hills, *
fruit trees and all cedars;
- 10 Wild beasts and all cattle, *
creeping things and winged birds;
- 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, *
princes and all rulers of the world;
- 12 Young men and maidens, *
old and young together.
- 13 Let them praise the Name of the Lord, *
for his Name only is exalted,
his splendor is over earth and heaven.
- 14 He has raised up strength for his people
and praise for all his loyal servants, *
the children of Israel, a people who are near him.
Hallelujah!

The Epistle

Revelation 21:1-6

I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, **I am making all things new.**” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.**”

The Gospel

John 13:31-35

At the last supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, **‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’** I give you a new commandment, that **you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.** By this everyone will know that you are **my disciples**, if you have **love for one another.**”

διακρίνω

Transliteration

diakrinō

Pronunciation

dē-ä-krē'-nō (Key)

Part of Speech

verb

Root Word (Etymology)

From [διά \(G1223\)](#) and [κρίνω \(G2919\)](#)

KJV Translation Count — Total: 19x

The KJV translates Strong's G1252 in the following

manner: [doubt](#) (5x), [judge](#) (3x), [discern](#) (2x), [contend](#) (2x), [waver](#) (2x), [miscellaneous](#) (5x).

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]

- I. to separate, make a distinction, discriminate, to prefer
- II. to learn by discrimination, to try, decide
 - A. to determine, give judgment, decide a dispute
- III. to withdraw from one, desert
- IV. to separate one's self in a hostile spirit, to oppose, strive with dispute, contend
- V. to be at variance with one's self, hesitate, doubt

μετάνοια

Transliteration

metanoia

Pronunciation

me-tä'-noi-ä (Key)

Part of Speech

feminine noun

Root Word (Etymology)

From [μετανοέω \(G3340\)](#)

KJV Translation Count — Total: 24x

The KJV translates Strong's G3341 in the following manner: [repentance](#) (24x).

Outline of Biblical Usage [?]

1. a change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done