

What I’m about to say is a bit weird. I just wanted to be upfront with you. But hopefully, eventually, it will all make sense. So here it is. Your mother is (or was) not an idea. Your mother is or was not a set of principles. Your mother is or was a **person**. Obvious, but important, for reasons that will become clear as we go.

It might be the most profound human relationship we experience—mother to child. When that relationship is good, it is really good, and has a lifelong positive impact—and conversely, when that relationship is bad, it is really bad, and that brokenness can be hard to overcome. And then, the loss of even a Christian mother to death, even as we trust in the full power of Jesus’ resurrection to make that a temporary loss for us, is still uniquely, deeply painful. This is all because we are created for relationship with others; we are at once the result of a God who is a relationship within Himself and the result of the relationship between parents, and we come into this world completely dependent on someone to care for us. How you and I understand life is forever influenced by those someones who cared for us. Relationship with father; relationship with mother, good or bad, positive or negative, sets the course for our lives. And you don’t have a relationship with an idea, or a set of principles; you have that relationship with a person. Now hold onto that thought.

In today’s passage from John’s gospel, Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for the fact that he will not always be with them. This is, of course, hard for them to hear and even harder for them to understand. So he impresses upon them that the reason he has to go is overwhelmingly good: He is going to His Father’s house to prepare a place for them. Then, when the time is right, he will return to bring them to this amazing place, and he mentions that they know the way to the place he is going.

This is all a little too much for Thomas, and it seems likely that this is a case of him saying what everyone else is thinking, for he speaks up, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” The disciple is confused, understandably. They had gathered for the Passover Meal. This was supposed to be a remembrance, a time of togetherness, but there was all this business of Judas leaving the table abruptly and now Jesus was talking about going somewhere they couldn’t. Going to his Father’s house to prepare rooms? And Jesus says we know the way? It’s just not clicking for Thomas.

So Jesus replies: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have known me, you will also know my Father.”

Jesus is talking about leaving. He’s talking about his death and resurrection. He’s talking about his ascension into heaven. He’s talking about eternity with God the Father, using the language of a spacious house. And most crucially, he’s talking about the way there. And look at what he says: he says he is the way there. The way into a meeting with the Father is not based on good performance or following the rules. The way into meeting with the Father is a person. The way into a room in the Father’s house is having a relationship with his Son.

This is the revolution of the gospel; the way into the Father's house; the concept of truth, and the very definition of life itself depends on connection with a person. It all depends on relating to and relying on Jesus. Why is this a revolution? Because this turns religion upside down. This is a completely unique spirituality. There's nothing else like it. For thousands and thousands of years, and right up to the present day, the religions of the world have taught that the way into God is paved with hard work, dedication, high performance, and following the rules. How do you know if you've done enough to get in all the way? If you're not sure, do some more. But it's on you to take what you've been given and find a way in.

What Jesus offers is unheard of and revolutionary: He says I am your way in. He takes the work out of your hands, which is a good thing, an excellent thing, in fact. The prophet Isaiah says that even our best good deeds are like filthy rags, and the apostle Paul writes that no one will be justified by works of the Law. That doesn't stop human beings from making their works their trust and making their own goodness their trust, but if you've ever tired that—and I bet you have, I know I have—then you know that there is no peace that accompanies making your self your trust; only a burdened conscience, and a tendency to judge others based on your standards. What Jesus offers is revolutionary because he will replace your work with his; and the difference is, his work is perfect. Jesus says, make me your trust. I am your way in. There is no sin to prevent you from coming into where the Father is because I paid for it all on the cross. The way in is not a method; it is not a technique; it is not a list of rules or principles; the way in is a person. It is Jesus. Put all your weight on him.

This is the gospel—the announcement of news that changes things. Yet some will object. Human nature does not like having the work removed from our hands. Many would rather still try to do it themselves. Others will say, “The thing that I don't like about Christianity is that it's exclusive. Jesus makes this claim—no one comes to the Father except through me. That's so narrow!” And the truth is, the gospel is specific, and the truth also is there are other areas of life where being narrow is not a problem. For example, what if tomorrow, the news broke that an effective vaccine has been developed for the coronavirus and will be made available by injection only. Now there would undoubtedly be people who say, “Oh, I don't do needles.” But most people would line up to get the shot.

What Jesus offers is revolutionary; He offers a cure. He offers a cure from guilt and shame; a cure from the downward spiral of a self-centered life; a cure from wanting to be god of our lives. When you abandon making your personal performance your trust and make Jesus your trust instead, the load is lifted, and not only that, but a healing takes place; a healthy humility takes hold in your heart. It's no longer an offense that Jesus brings you in; it's a marvel. It's a wonder of grace that he would bring me in to His Father's house. That softens my heart with compassion for others, and that doesn't come from a rulebook; that comes from dwelling on Jesus, thinking about Him and talking to Him in prayer. It means accepting that I owe him everything—it cost him his life to bring me into his Father's house—and how could you not love someone who would go to such lengths?

And if he is willing to do that for your eternal well-being, then he must be committed to tend to you every day along the way. In other words, we've talked about Jesus as the way and the truth, but what about the life? How is relationship with Jesus the life of a Christian?

Answering that question deserves about a hundred more sermons—don't worry, I'm not going to attempt that now—so let me just draw a comparison.

When you're a little kid and you're playing outside, if you were anything like me, it was inevitable that at some point you were going to get hurt. Whether it was a bump on the head or a skinned knee or a big splinter, you'd get hurt somehow. And what was your reaction? I know what mine was. Run back inside the house and look for mom. And if you get hurt, and you run inside looking for mom, why are you doing that? Are you hoping that she will sit you down and give you information about your injury and explain the probability involved with infection and give you a timetable for your recovery? No! You're running in because you know mom will give you hug and let you cry and dry your tears and get out the antiseptic and band aids, but its mostly the fact that she's there that gives you comfort. It's the security of being with a person whose love for you is unquestioned that makes things right; that balances you out.

Do you see the comparison? Peace, security and strength for each and every day is not really a matter of right ideas or right principles but the right person. It is running in to find Jesus when times are tough, but it is also celebrating the good times with him. It's a daily remembrance that he has connected himself to you in Holy Baptism, claiming you and calling you his own. And it's a growing awareness that when I do what is right and good, Jesus is behind it. He's the instigator of a servant heart. In these ways and many more He is your life today.

The way; the truth; the life; is a person—Jesus. Get to know him. His love for you is unquestioned.