

Sermon – The Reverend Timothy A. R. Cole
Easter 5, May 14, 2017
John 14:1-14

I met a wonderful Jewish Rabbi once called Lionel Blue. Sadly, he died just last December. Famous in the UK, at least, he was a much loved broadcaster and journalist. He had a gentle, honest, down to earth humor that endeared him to many, many people. He also had a significant impact on me for this day, Mothers' Day, over many years until my own mother died. Every Mothers' Day card I sent her always had the same inscription that came from a story Lionel Blue once told about two Jewish mothers.

They are talking one day when one says to the other, "Oy veh – my son, the psychiatrist, says that he has an Oedipus Complex!" The other mother replies, "Oedipus shmedipus, what does it matter so long as he loves his Mama!" Thus it was that I signed every Mother's Day card for 20 years "Oedipus Shmedipus" right up until she died in 2001.

So today we celebrate Mothers' Day, giving thanks for our mothers and for all their love and labors for us. The appreciation of a mother's love runs deep and, of course, when it is not there, that absence of it runs just as deeply too. Sadly, not all mothers are kind to their children and, so, while today is a joy to most of us, we should keep in mind that it can also be a real struggle for some.

In today's Gospel we hear those profound words of Christ that echo across the years to us. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

How can he be the way? How can he be the truth? How can he be the life?

Not that long ago I went through a phase where I thought sailing was going to be my last great love and adventure. I had this thought that I might learn to sail and make a long voyage somewhere in my retirement. As a result, I learned a bit about navigation at sea, and I found that the path of a sailing boat is not straightforward. You may be heading due West, for instance, but, what you can't see are the great movements of the tides and currents that are acting on the boat from underneath. You may be pointing solidly West but, with these forces acting on the boat, you may in fact be heading Southwest because you are being quietly pushed south all the time.

Jesus' way, the way of faith, is like that. We are all on our various courses in life doing the things we have to do. Getting educated, working hard in our jobs, bringing up and educating our own children, but Jesus's way is separate from that: Always connected but still separate. Often it is hidden to us, like the tide and the current, a great spiritual current that always points one way regardless of where our lives are headed. If we choose to, we can run against it and steer away from it. We can steer so that we are moving only in the direction of the world. We can, of course, also choose to allow this sacred drift. Even as we still keep doing the things we have to do and head in the direction life requires of us, we can also be moving down that different and often hidden path that Jesus has left for us to follow.

I knew a man once who came to theological college in Edinburgh where I was studying. He had been a successful chartered accountant in a big firm in London but had given that up later in life to train to be a priest. He cut a striking contrast to most of us at college, not least because he drove a wonderful Lotus Élan sports car that had such a big engine that it would overheat if you drove it at less than 30MPH for any length of time. I liked him, but some of the more pious brethren sided against him because he was very “establishment” and came from the wealthy, professional class of the big, bad city. He even had the temerity to dress smartly and wear a bow tie. That would be perfectly all right at Christ Church, of course, but in the Theological Colleges of the 1980’s it did not go down well. What those who resented him did not know, and what I did not know until much later, was that he had indeed had a lot of money but, when he decided to leave that life and train for the priesthood, he had in fact given away the vast majority of it. He had only kept enough to keep his beloved sports car on the road. Not quite Saint Francis of Assisi, but a lot closer to him than some of my more resentful colleagues were in fact. They had little, but they had given up little. He had almost as little, but he had given up more than they ever had or would have.

Jesus is the truth, and we hope that he is the truth about us, regardless of what other people may think. He is a truth that is often hidden in the deepest parts of the people we see day to day. The boss in the office; the Uber driver; the woman sitting on the park bench: We look at people, and we don’t know what is in them. We can only pray that, if people saw the truth about us, that they would see something of Christ’s truth, bow ties and sports cars aside.

Yesterday a host of people were confirmed and received into the Episcopal Church at the Cathedral, and we had 12 people from our own congregation there. In the Anglican tradition, the Cathedral is the mother church of the diocese: Sometimes because Cathedrals give birth to new congregations, but more constantly the status as mother refers to the fact that Cathedrals gather us together for important events like ordinations, festivals, diocesan conferences and synods, and most importantly, for confirmations and receptions. One of the things that defines us as Episcopalians is that all of us, at some stage in our lives, have a bishop lay hands on us. This sacred and holy touch, that has passed physically from Christ to the Apostles, down the ages through many hands, to you and me today, was given to another generation of Episcopalians yesterday at the Cathedral.

Touch is appropriate for us to think of today because a mother’s love is a very physical thing. I remember my mother insisted on licking her handkerchief in order to clean marks from my face when it was dirty when we were out: A practice that I hated and found revolting and barbaric at the time, but which I now think of as just one of the many ways she touched me. She cleaned, cajoled, dressed and force fed me at times. Always pushing me forward, and trying, most often in vain, to make me presentable, healthy, and behaving like a human being. And, of course, she held me when I was broken and hurt, and used everything from butter balls rolled in sugar for my earache, to Band-Aids for my knees, to strong words against anyone who dared to speak ill of me. Even if, in truth, they were more than half right!

So today, as we reflect on Jesus the way, the truth, and the life, we give thanks also for our own mothers and for our spiritual mother, the Church, whose hands touch us with a

holy and sacred touch that reminds us of who we are and to whom we belong. She feeds us with Christ in the sacrament and she helps us discern the hidden tide and current of Christ in our lives. She sees in us, not the truth the world sees, but the truth that is Christ in us.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Perhaps the questions for us today are these: Where is Christ leading me at this time of my life? Where is his current and tide flowing? What truth is he showing me, and to what life is he calling me?

What he is, we are to become.