



## St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

May 3, 2026; Easter 5A: [Acts 7:55-60](#) [1 Peter 2:2-10](#) [John 14:1-14](#)

As I wrote in my cover for the newsletter, this has been a week of funerals and memorials services. With tonight's Fire Chief's Memorial and the addition Friday of a service for Olive Jewett, a 102-year-old Bonacker who sang in St Luke's choir in 1942, it will have been six services in 10 days. Having put many of these sorts of services together, I can tell you that except for Psalm 23, John 14 - the passage we just read - is the most common scripture that families request for funerals. They like the idea that God's house has many rooms and that there is a place reserved for each of us. Like Jesus' words (John 10:16), "I have other sheep who are not of this fold" this passage promises that the Kingdom of God welcomes everyone. That hope of inclusion, however, seems to be dashed by the words which follow, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me."

This morning, my goal is to dig into these words and turn this impression around. My hope is that if you can look at this passage through the lens of Jesus - especially the Jesus shown in the Gospel of John - you will come to see that rather than being exclusive, this one of the most expansive, inclusive passages of the Bible itself

Let's start with a bit of context. While the date of authorship isn't completely clear, most scholars think that the Gospel of John was written after 90 CE, at least sixty or more years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. From a religious perspective, this was an apocalyptic time. The Romans had desecrated and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. People of faith were being persecuted. Caesar had proclaimed himself to be a god. In that time of chaos and confusion, false messiahs, false prophets, false teachers, and false healers and miracle workers competed with one another for prominence, just as they had in Jesus' own day. Pause for a moment to remember that Jesus and his disciples were Jewish. When Jesus was alive, there was no such thing as Christianity and Buddhism and Islam wouldn't even show up for hundreds of years. As we will hear next week, when

Paul was confronted with an altar to an unknown Roman god, he didn't repudiate it. He named it and claimed it, saying that the people worshipping there were worshipping Jesus. When Jesus said, "No one comes to the father but me," he wasn't talking about people in other religions, he was concerned about those who were blaspheming his own. He was talking about false prophets, false teachers, false messiahs from his own faith who were misleading, manipulating his own people – the very people he came to serve. There are very clear modern parallels to this situation. If you think about your feelings towards those promulgating Christian Nationalism today, you can begin to understand why Jesus was so upset.

John's Gospel has what theologians call a "High Christology," a high view of Jesus' identity. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are a little evasive about Jesus' relationship with God. John lays it right out. In John 10:30, Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." In John 18:6, he says "I am he." In John 8:58, Jesus says this again, using the same words as God at the burning bush: "Before Abraham was born, I am." In John's Gospel, Jesus is not a 30-year-old itinerant rabbi with a beard, a tie-dye shirt and a lamb on his shoulder who went around saying nice things and healing people. John's Gospel begins by telling us that Jesus is the Word of God that has existed from before creation and that Jesus is the ground of all being and source of light and life in the universe itself. To quote the creed, John's Gospel tells us that Jesus is God from God, Light from Light, very God from very God, begotten, not made, and of one Being with the Father. To put it simply, in John's Gospel, Jesus and God are the same. If Jesus and God are the same, then anyone who has experienced God - in any form and in any religion - has experienced Jesus. If God is love and Jesus is the embodiment of the way of love, anyone who has experienced love or walked in the way of love and compassion, has experienced Jesus. For the author of the Gospel of John "No one comes to the father except through me" isn't a statement of exclusion, it is simply a statement of fact. It is an expression of the expansive comprehensiveness of the love of God and the inclusion of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed.

Jesus knew that all this could be a bit heady and confusing. When Philip wanted clarity, Jesus told him to look at his actions instead of his words. His message was simple: "Want to know who I am and what I am about? Look at the hurts that are healed, the sins that are forgiven, and the hearts that are set on fire. Look at how the world and the people in it have changed because of me. My goal, my role, is to empower you to do these things... and more." The way to build your faith is to live it out, to be about what Jesus was about. The way to follow Jesus is to follow his example, doing things like working for peace in

a time of war, striving for restorative justice instead of judgement, creating opportunities for healing and reconciliation instead of hurt and revenge, caring for the poor and welcoming a stranger instead of pushing those people away. Warning: These things will be perceived as radical, threatening, and even blasphemous to those whose belief is in themselves rather than God. In our reading from Acts, the people killed Stephen - the first deacon - for doing deacon things like caring for widows and orphans and ministering to people in his congregation and community who needed help. They killed Stephen because his actions showed people that God's house had many rooms and that they would all be welcomed and cared for there. They killed Stephen for the same reason they killed Jesus – because they perceived him as a threat, because he actually gave people an experience of God.

I began this sermon by challenging you to look at the Gospel of John through the lens of the Gospel of John. I end by challenging you to look at Jesus through the lens of Jesus, not just to see Jesus yourselves but to be Jesus for others. To paraphrase St. Francis, our task is to “preach the gospel, and if we have to, use words.” In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places, a place reserved for everyone. Our task is to show people that is true.