

I am

22 5 11

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us
the gate of everlasting life:
grant that as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect.

My text may be found in today's gospel from John 14 and is part of verse 6: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life'.

If you go out of the gate of the Abbey at St Jacut and onto the path looking across the estuary of the Arguenon towards St Cast de Guildo, there on a wall is metal cross, an open lattice-work of iron. As a leaving present, Denise Peacock gave me a stunning photograph of it taken towards sunset at one of our Archdeaconry Synods for the Anglican Communion in France. The light is an orange-gold and across the water a sun-path sparkles and shimmers on the rippling sea while the sun itself haloes the centre of this cross. It's like a finger of light from the sky, as if God is using the sun to point to the cross as a sign that in his Son, Jesus Christ, God is revealing himself to us.

Of course, how we interpret what we see depends on our level of understanding. And it is precisely a lack of understanding that permeates today's passage. Poor Thomas, as ever literally-minded asks Jesus a reasonable question. Jesus tells them that shortly he will be leaving them to be the Father where he will prepare a place for them. But not to worry – they know the way to him. Confused, Thomas states what to him is frighteningly obvious: 'Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? And Jesus patiently replies with today's text: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life'.

To understand, we simply have to know that 'I am' is coded language for God. At the burning bush, when Moses asks God his name, God replies, 'I AM WHO I AM'. (Exodus 3v14) The real name of God is too sacred, too precious, too powerful to utter and so we have this substitute for a name, a verb 'I AM' which tells us a truth about the nature of God: that He is the eternal, ever-living God, unageing, and unchanging. Any Jew would know as much. In the right context, properly used, 'I am' is a way of naming God. Peculiar to John's gospel are the seven great 'I am's. We heard one last week – 'I am the door of the sheepfold' (10 v9) – as homework, you might care to search your memories or John for the other five!

So Jesus is telling Thomas something quite stunning: Jesus is telling him that he, Jesus, is God and that by following him, by understanding what he has been teaching them, Thomas and all Christians thereafter have a road map for life, a pointer to the way that will ultimately lead us to the Father where Jesus is, where the 'I am' is, where we one day will be.

All is well ? Not quite because Philip is being particularly stupid demanding the impossible: Philip says, 'Show us the Father and we will be satisfied.' I think one of Homer Simpson's contemptuous 'D . o . h' might be appropriate here or the modern use of 'Hello ?' as a suggestion the person we are talking to has failed to engage his brain before opening his mouth ! No one can see God but the paradox is, to see Jesus is to see God. If Philip bothered to open his eyes and not his mouth, he would see that he has the answer to his question before he needed to ask it !

So today, let me leave you with this thought: that God is here; that his Spirit is with us; and that in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, we can find God. But as ever the question remains: are our eyes open to see and our ears ready to hear ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Written for the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

22nd May 2011

H: Sermon 23: I am

