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## I AM STORIES

Gracious God, May these words be your words of life Amen

### **GSP**

Last week Bill and I were going to a part of town in Omaha with which we were not familiar. So, I plugged in my steady GPS and punched in the address. And off we went. I decided to stop for gas, go through a drive through for lunch and take 84<sup>th</sup> street instead of going to the interstate the way I was being directed. At each turn, the GPS said, “Re-calculating “Now, I find this irritating voice, well, irritating... If the voice on the GPS was Denzel Washington’s, Morgan Freeman’s, Maya Angelou’s voice, I might be more likely to listen. But, I knew by its directions, that it was sending my straight back to the beginning of our journey to take the ONLY path that it had chosen for us. Even when I got on the interstate, it re- calculated to send me to an off ramp to turn around and go back to Lincoln. This raises the questions – and I hope that this is not too much of a stretch. - Is there only one path that God calls us to take in our spiritual lives? Can we detour from that one path, or God will be “re- calculating “ for us forever?

### **MAKING A PLACE**

In the Gospel of John, we hear a departing speech from Jesus. He is saying good bye to his disciples. They are panicked, confused and hurt. He tells them that he is going to make a way for them. In his father’s house there are many room, or shelters. In ancient times, when tribes journeyed, a guide would go before them to make the way, and then

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the guide would unpack and raise the shelters, so there was a place for them when they arrived.

Gayle Land's tells a story about when her children were young. She and her husband had made a decision to move across the country. But, they missed their families. So, for the holidays, they would pack up the car and travel 8 hours with 3 small children to get to her husband's childhood home. They would begin their journey after work and drive till late into the night. No matter what time of night they arrived, her husband's mother had spread blankets and pillows on the floor. She had prepared a place for them, a home full of love and welcome.

## **THE PATH OF LOVE**

When we hear this speech made by Jesus, we can be confused. Actually, the disciples were confused too. Jesus was telling them that he was leaving, but he was going to prepare a place for them. THEN he begins with the I AM statements. I AM the way the truth and the life. No one gets to the father but by me. WOW- This scripture has been used again and again to exclude. But the WAY of LOVE is to include people ... And if you read further, you see that the disciples were already experiencing God through a RELATIONSHIP with Jesus. I don't believe that way of Jesus depends on the words we say in a creed or what BELIEF that we say we have, it is about the way we live out our relationship with God in our life journey. Jesus' way is the way of relationship, of discovering and offering the home of God, the act of love.

So often, we have heard this passage quoted to say that Christianity is the only way to be in relationship with God. But, we live in a multi

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religious, multi-cultural world. So how do we deal with that? Only our religion is the right one? There is beauty and truths in so many different cultures and religions.

In the book THE SHACK, the Jesus figures says, “God loves us so much that God is willing to journey on any path we take and meet us on the path.”

As Christians, the path that we have chosen, is the path of Jesus, And that means something. Jesus tells us about healing, hospitality... Jesus, through his life death and resurrections tells us that there is so much more to life. As a wedding vow, a groom makes to a bride, or a bride makes to a groom- .... We have vowed to journey with Jesus.... In sickness and health, plenty and much, good times and bad... But, does that dismiss the other religions that we have in our world? There is something beautiful about the detachment of Buddhism or the practice of prayer of Islam. Don't most religions at their core talk about the path of love?

### **CHALLENGES OF LIVING IN AN INTERFAITH WORLD**

So, how did we ever get ourselves into conflicts with other faiths? As Rob Bells describes, in ancient times the people observed this power-, electrical energy- in the world: thunderstorms, crops growing, the earth cracking, The Greeks called it Zoe, the mystics called it SPIRIT, and Obi Wan Kanobi called it THE FORCE. Each faith thought that their god was the one who had the power. And to have the power meant you'd have the blessings from the god that you worshipped. . If they had it right, all the others MUST have it wrong. It set up an US- THEM scenario. We now have ways of explaining the growth of crops, and the movement of the moon, the shaking of the earth.

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But, religion still shape our lives. It tells connects us with the HOLY. . If we accept believe that each religion chooses a different way of beings: like a groom chooses a different bride, or a bride chooses a groom, we could relax. But, can we just say, RELAX, LIVE AND LET LIVE?

What standards are we called to have? We don't believe that acid should be thrown in women's faces or women should be stoned to death. We have to ask- Is this a cultural norm or a religious norm? Parents beating their children- religious or cultural norm? People dressing up in sheets and setting fire to crosses and people's homes is not the way of love. Cultural norm or religious? Cruelty or even death to gay men, a cultural norm or religious norm? Wars, the taking away of land—don't think so... - way of love? It is so hard to draw a line between cultural and religious norms at times. But I can tell you this. Each religion is full of diverse voices, same a Christianity. Any voice that promotes destruction or cruelty, it is not the way of The Creator. It is not the way the truth and the life.

The answer is in the scripture that we have just read. Jesus DOES show us the way. And it is a way of light, life, warmth, compassion and love. This is the common ground on which we can stand and journey. So, to our stubborn GPSs, let's just throw them out the window and listen to not the nagging voice of only one path, but to the voice of Jesus who listens to our hearts and guides us with love.