



**A sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist at Wells
Cathedral, preached on Sunday 19 October 2025 by
the Reverend Simon Lewis, Sub-Dean.**

What does it mean to be someone who follows The Way of Jesus?

As the rain and the snow come down from above, and return not again but water the earth bringing forth life and giving growth, so may the words that I speak, return to you, Lord, bearing fruit. Amen.

Introduction

For some of us the question is “Who am I as a Christian?” For others of us it will be “What is a Christian?” Or to phrase it differently, What does it mean to be someone who follows ‘The Way of Jesus?’

In seeking an answer, I’m not interested in making lists that decide who’s in and who’s out. I’m not trying to play spiritual referee, whistle in my mouth, handing out red cards to the “wrong Christians.” (Although on my off days, I can be sorely tempted!) But that game is exhausting and, honestly, misses the point. What I’m after is the heart of the thing - what’s really at the centre of being Christian.

First, the Negative

In offering you a thought, let me first get rid of the negative: what Christianity is not. Christianity has been hijacked by this idea that it’s about believing the right stuff. That if you can tick the right boxes, pass the right religious exam, you’re in.

Quite honestly, that’s a distortion. A late-arrival distortion, actually. It got tangled up in the Reformation (when Protestants started defining themselves over against Catholics) and then tangled again in the Enlightenment (when science started poking holes in church explanations of the universe). Suddenly, “faith” became this stubborn insistence that you believe in spite of evidence. And from there came modern literalism: six-day creation, global flood, Jesus walking on water exactly as a YouTube clip might show it, if someone had filmed it. Faith became gritting your teeth and saying, “I believe it anyway.”

But here's the problem: believing the right things does not transform people. You can be an academic genius, have all your doctrines alphabetised on a shelf, and still be petty, fearful, arrogant, even cruel. History is proof enough of that.

For many Christians today, the words "We believe" or "I believe" can feel heavy or uncertain. For example people do ask, "I'm finding it hard to say the Creed. What does that mean for my faith? Am I still a Christian if I can't say it?" This struggle often comes from feeling required to, even being asked to, affirm a list of beliefs - doctrines - that one is expected to accept as literal and absolute truth.

The Older, Deeper Thing

This brings me to the older, deeper thing. From the very beginning, "believing" wasn't about checking intellectual boxes. It was about *loving*. To believe in Jesus wasn't to pass a religious test; it was to throw your heart at him, to trust, to be faithful; as seen in the stories of the Bible. The old word *credo* - usually translated "I believe" - literally means "I give my heart to."

The Nicene Creed, which we will be saying immediately after this talk, isn't a multiple-choice exam. It's a love song.

"We give our hearts to one God,
maker of heaven and earth.

"We give our hearts to one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the one who shows us what God looks like
in flesh and blood.

"We give our hearts to the Holy Spirit
who lives in and breathes God's life in us."

That's a different kind of believing. It's not about intellectual assent; it is about relational commitment.

You can even make it more personal. Alter the 'We' to 'I'...

"I give my heart to one God...

"I give my heart to one Lord, Jesus Christ...

"I give my heart to the Holy Spirit...

The Heart of It

Being Christian isn't about being right; saying the right 'belief statements'. It is about being swept up in a transformation of the heart. Reshaping how we see, what we love, and how we live. At the heart of this reshaping, and therefore at the heart of what it means to be Christian, I'm offering you four passions to reflect on:

The first, is a **passion for God**. 1600 years ago the philosopher, theologian and Bishop Augustine said it well: "our hearts are restless until they find their home in God" (Source 1.1, 2.5). Being Christian is being restless for God. Sometimes it feels like a desperate hunger, other times like a deep gladness - but it's always a longing.

The second passion, is a **passion for Jesus**. For Christians, Jesus is the decisive revelation of God - not because other religions don't reveal God, but because *this* is where we've seen God most clearly. Not a book. Not a theory. A person. Christians find God in Jesus 'humanity: his compassion, his fierce love, his refusal to play by the violent rules of the world.

Compassion is the third **passion**. As Jesus said in Luke: "Learn to be compassionate as [God] is compassionate." Not just feeling, but doing. That's it. Not "be right." Not "be safe." Compassion. And not just feeling it - doing it. The Hebrew root for compassion is tied to "womb." God loves like a mother, fierce and tender, life-giving and protective. To be a follower of the way of Jesus - Christian - is to let that womb-like compassion drive your choices.

The final passion I offer is a **passion for transformation in this world**. Compassion doesn't stop at feelings. It grows into justice and peace. Justice not as punishment, but as fairness - everyone having enough, because God's world belongs to God, not to the few who grab the most. Peace not as sentiment, but as the end of violence and war. This is God's dream: a healed world, mended systems, reconciled people.

Let me share something I noticed that Paul did not say to Timothy in our New, Testament reading. He did not say, "Memorise the right doctrines and pass that religious test." He did say, *stay grounded in the story, stay faithful in the way you live, stay persistent even when people would rather hear something easier, shinier, or trendier.*

How Paul Shapes this?

What I hear God saying is that following the way of Jesus isn't about being right. It's about being transformed to be able to be **passionate** about God.

Being transformed to use **scripture as story, not a weapon**. Paul calls scripture “inspired,” God-breathed. But scripture is not given as ammunition to prove we’re correct; it’s given as a living-guide for shaping you into a person, a people, of compassion and justice. The Bible is not an idol. It’s a lens, a pointer toward God - and it points to the way of Jesus.

Being transformed so that there is **persistence in love**. Paul warns that you will sometimes wander off to teachers who tell you what your “itching ears want to hear.” That’s you when you want a tidy, shallow faith that demands nothing of you. But following the way of Jesus isn’t about ease; it’s about staying faithful in the messiness of your lives; in season and out of season; even when it’s messy; even when in the crowd.

Having a **heart transformed**. God through Paul reminds all of us: the point of scripture isn’t head-knowledge. It’s being “trained in righteousness” - *shaped* into being a person whose life looks like Jesus. It’s not about believing the right things but giving your heart, living compassion, and becoming a participant in God’s dream for the world: that in itself brings the right things to believe in.

And finally, being transformed to be a **vocation of witness**. “Do the work of an evangelist,” Paul says. And what is evangelism if not *embodying* good news? Not shouting down enemies with arguments, but living in such a way that people see compassion, justice, and love in action. The “good news” becomes believable not because we argued it well, but because it was lived passionately and beautifully.

So, What Is the Answer?

Let me take you back to question, what does it mean to be someone who follows the way of Jesus, also known as a Christian? Well, it is not someone who gets all the answers right - so please don’t try.

Someone who follows Jesus keeps the faith; persists even when it’s messy; lets scripture breathe life into them; and proclaims good news not only with their mouth, but with their whole life.

And ,yes, it’s messy. It’s unfinished. But it’s 100% real.

Thank you for reading.

Simon Lewis, Sub-Dean

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