

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Easter 5, Series A  
Saturday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
Sunday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Sermon: One Way  
Text: John 14:1-14

Focus: Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Function: That they would believe in Jesus and the Father—and encourage others to do the same.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “I believe that Jesus Christ... is my Lord...” (SC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of Apostles’ Creed).

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. I have preached on today’s Gospel lesson at least a dozen times—always at funerals, never at weekend worship. Usually, my focus is on Jesus’ promise to go and prepare a place for us in heaven. Today I focus on John 14:6 as Jesus confronts us with some of the most offensive words ever spoken by a human being. Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, ESV).<sup>1</sup> Theologians call this the exclusive claim of Christ: the assertion that Jesus himself is the only way to be saved and find God. No other sacred or philosophical paths, no other religious

---

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

teachers, no other works or moral efforts are of any use. Only Jesus saves. He doesn't mince words. When he claims to be *the* Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life, all other ways are excluded. Apart from Jesus, we are doomed and damned.

Of course, that idea goes over like a lead balloon in our pluralistic, post-modern world, where tolerance is a cardinal virtue. Many people bristle against truth claims that exclude other religions. Some of you have probably heard the idea that there is one mountain, but many paths. In other words, there is more than one way to God. Some people—including many Christians—get outright angry if you insist that Jesus is the only way to heaven. It goes against the grain of our culture of “I’m okay, you’re okay.” Think of those stupid COEXIST bumper stickers that are popular around the Denver metro, the ones that spell out the word *coexist* with the symbols of various religions and movements as if to say that all religions are really about the same:



The Millennial generation especially tries hard to smooth over differences and rejects as unfair any kind of standard or organization that leaves people on the outside. To insist on the exclusive claim of Christ is downright outlandish to many of them.

This attitude reminds me of a book I saw a few years ago called *Jesus & Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*. The idea of the book is that because Jesus and Buddha both taught similar wisdom and ethics, we should view them as essentially the same. In the introduction to the book, author Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist teacher, describes a statue he saw during a visit to a Buddhist monastery in the Mekong Delta during the Vietnam War:

“...On top of a hill, there was an enormous fifty-foot tall statue of a standing Buddha. Next to Buddha stood an equally tall statue of Jesus. They had their arms around each other’s shoulders, smiling. While helicopter gunships flew by overhead and war raged around us, Buddha and Jesus stood there like brothers, expressing compassion and healing for all who would follow their way.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Jack Kornfield, Introduction, in *Jesus & Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*, ed. Marcus Borg (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2002), 6-7.

Jesus and Buddha smile give each other a “bro hug” while bombs drop around them. Doesn't it sound wonderful? Isn't it great to see how much they have in common?

No, not at all! Because it is a misrepresentation of reality. The idea that all religions are the same waters down all of them. More than that, it's an insult. First of all, not all religions are even shooting for the same destination. Hindus and Buddhists aren't trying to go to heaven. They're trying to reach Nirvana (Enlightenment) so they can break free from the cycle of reincarnation they foolishly believe exists. And even if Jews, Muslims, and Christians all believe in one God and life after death, that doesn't mean that we believe in the *same* God! Only Christians worship Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It's offensive to Muslims to even suggest that Allah could have a son. For Jews, Jesus is either a false prophet, a failed messiah, or just another rabbi among many who lived. Jews and Muslims don't pray to Jesus. They don't worship him as Lord! So to say that we believe basically the same things is just nonsense.

And painting Jesus as just another guru, prophet, rabbi, or moral teacher, is an injustice to the Son of God who definitely claimed to be “the way, the truth, and the life.” Jesus never said that he was one of many ways to the Father. He said that he is *the* Way—the *only* Way. “No one comes to the Father except through me,” Jesus insists. And that is why he urged his disciples: “Believe in God, and believe in me” (John 14:1). Jesus leaves no room to believe in Buddha, Allah, Krishna, the Great Spirit, Mother Earth, or the Virgin Mary. That would be idolatry. The First Commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). Literally, God says, “You shall have no other gods *before my face.*” In other words, God doesn’t want to *see* any other gods in your life. He is a jealous God. And Jesus is an exclusive Christ.

**[Skip next story at 8 AM service]**

When I was a student at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, I volunteered with the LCMS International Student Ministry by helping with ESL classes for international students. The setup was really quite simple. Once a week, I met with a small group of college students at nearby Fontbonne University. The goal was just to engage in

conversation about everyday stuff—school, sports, hobbies—so that the students could practice their English. In turn, the other volunteers and I sought opportunity to share our faith and witness to Christ.

Because we were all students, it was inevitable that the international students would figure out that the seminarians were studying theology and the Bible.

“Oh,” said one of the girls, “so you’re going to be a priest?”

“Not a priest,” I said, “Not exactly. But a Christian pastor. My job is going to be to tell people about Jesus.”

“*Jesus?!?*” she exclaimed. “*I love Jesus! I pray to Jesus everyday.*”

“That’s wonderful!” I said.

“Yes,” she nodded. “I have a statue of Jesus in my closet next to my statues of Buddha and Mary. I pray to each of them every day.”

“But you should only pray to Jesus,” I insisted. “He wants to be your *only* God.”

She frowned as I tried to explain that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life—and Buddha and the Virgin Mary would only let her down. Even Mary, I reasoned, only prayed to Jesus. The girl’s eyebrows

furrowed even deeper, and she changed the subject. I don't know if she was angry or confused (maybe both). Sadly, I never convinced her. But everything I said was true, not because it is my personal opinion, but because Jesus said it, and *his* Word is truth (John 17:17).

**[Continue sermon here at 5 PM and 11 AM]**

Jesus is not just one path among many to scale the mountain. He is not just another good teacher. In fact, when somebody called him good teacher, Jesus countered that only God is good, testing to see if the rich, young ruler was ready to recognize the truth about Jesus' divine identity (Luke 18:18-19). Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. He insisted he had the authority to forgive sins. He also said he existed from eternity (just like God!). If true, that makes Jesus more than a mere mortal. A merely good teacher could not say the same things about himself.

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis confronts the idea that Jesus could be a good teacher or prophet but not the Son of God, as Christ claimed. According to Lewis, this doesn't take Jesus seriously as he presented himself:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”<sup>3</sup>

Evangelical scholars and apologists have summarized Lewis’s argument as the Lewis trilemma: either Jesus is a liar, lunatic, or Lord. Liar, lunatic, or Lord. You cannot have it three ways. Jesus is the only Way.

Yet, as David Kinnaman writes, “There is a world of difference between claiming that Jesus is exclusively the Christ and excluding people from fellowship with the Church.”<sup>4</sup> How do we preach the exclusive claim of Christ without turning the Church into an exclusive club? Jesus’ claim is exclusive because he is the only way, but it is also

---

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1943; reprint, New York: Touchstone, 1996), 55-56.

<sup>4</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, Kindle.

universal because of his open invitation. God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Yet this salvation is conditioned upon repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Repentance means turning away from sin—and turning away from other worldviews—that conflict with Christianity.

Jesus is the Way, the only Way. There is only ONE WAY to heaven: Jesus Christ. Dear friends, if you were teaching your kid to drive a car, would you encourage them to turn the wrong way on a one way street?



No, of course not! Why not? Because they would get into a car crash and hurt somebody. They might even kill themselves! It would be stupid and foolish—and evil!—to tell someone to turn the wrong way on a one way street. The same is true when it comes to our spiritual lives.

Jesus says that he is the Way. Who am I to argue with Jesus? It's his way or the highway to hell. There are no other paths.

And yet it also remains true that we don't want to turn the Church into a Christian country club. As I said last week, the Church is not a museum for saints, but a field hospital for sinners. Here is where we find life and salvation through Jesus Christ and his Word. Jesus was open to everyone, regardless of religion, race, or moral rectitude. He came "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). And he calls us to join him on his mission by going and making disciples of *all* nations, baptizing and teaching what Jesus taught (Matt. 28:19-20). As David Kinnaman writes, "Beyond the false choice between exclusion and tolerance, let's help the next generation see the Way—Jesus."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Quite notably, the earliest believers did not call themselves Christians. Did you know that? They called themselves followers of the Way (cf. Acts 9:2; 24:14, 22). Why? Because they followed *Jesus*, who is the Way. The followers of

---

<sup>5</sup> David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), Kindle edition.

the way were not following rules or a religion. Rather, they enjoyed a *relationship* with Jesus Christ, their risen Lord and Savior. Jesus is a Person, not a program. He is the loving Lord who died on the cross to forgive your sins and rose again to give you eternal life. He is the only way to the Father because he is the only one who loves us enough to do that for us. Buddha didn't bleed for you. Mohammed didn't rise again from the dead. But Jesus did. He did it for *you*. And he did it for every single person on the face of this planet, because whether they are an atheist, Muslim, Mormon, Buddhist, or Hindu, Jesus wants them to repent and be saved.

Jesus is a jealous God, not because he is insecure (like an overbearing boyfriend!), but because he wants *you* to be secure in his love. Any other god will only disappoint you and let you down. Any other path will be a dead end—literally and eternally! Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him—through the cross and the empty tomb. And that is very, very Good News indeed! Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

You can't say that about anybody else! In the name of the Father and of  
the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.