

One Way

St. Mark Lutheran
Three services

Pastor Ken Welsh
May 14, 2017

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long and you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." John 14:1-11

A Christian has to be very careful that false teaching about God does not seep into his beliefs about God.

I was privileged to teach in the West Geauga School system for thirty-three years. Our system was blessed to have a special art and music teacher so that the sixth grade teacher did not have to teach those subjects. One year, the music teacher taught a song named "One God" to the classes, and the combined classes sang it later at a concert. I had caught snatches of the song, and thought that the melody was very nice, but I did not hear all of the words together and catch the full force of the meaning until the final performance. As I remember, the lyrics went something like this:

Millions of stars, placed in the sky by one God;
Millions of us lift up our eyes to one God.
So many children calling to him by many a different name;
One Father, loving each the same.

Many the ways all of us pray to one God;
Many the paths winding their way to one God.
Walk with me brother, there were no strangers
After his work was done,
For your God, and my God, are one.
(Song believed to be based on "One God", a book written by Florence Mary Fitch)

I thought the melody was beautiful. The children did a great job of singing it. It expressed some appealing ideas. But as I began to reflect on the meaning of the words, I realized it contradicted the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures, with such phrases as "many the paths winding their way to one God" and "your God and my God are one".

I thought of that song when I sat down to write this sermon, and I entered the title in "Google" to make sure I remembered the words correctly. On one web site, the singing of the song was accompanied by pictures of different religions and their symbols. The meaning was clear. Many religions lead to God. Whatever name you call your God, he is the same God as my God. This is what Satan would like you to believe. This viewpoint is called universalism, or the idea that all religions lead to the same God.

But Jesus Christ, by his birth, life, death and resurrection, has stepped into human history and told us a much different story. In John 14:6 of our Gospel reading today he says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

For God did not take on flesh, enter human history as a baby, fulfil all those prophecies, and grow up to be falsely accused and convicted, be spat upon, ridiculed and crucified, in order to allow mankind to be forgiven by some man-made religion. That is contrary to the nature of God and his plan for redeeming the human race. If that were true, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins would have been unnecessary.

You better listen carefully to what people are telling you. You had better watch out for what the schools are teaching your children. Years ago, we had a guest speaker from another Lutheran Church body speak in our old church building, now remodelled into the Fellowship Hall. The guest speaker said he was puzzled by these words from John 14:6. He wasn't quite sure what they meant. Many of us were not happy with what he said because the words seemed very clear to us.

If someone really is puzzled with these words of Jesus, or is not clear on what they say, he can get some help from the rest of the Holy Scriptures. There is a Lutheran principle of studying Scripture and interpreting it: "Scripture helps interpret Scripture". So as we look elsewhere we see Jesus also said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." (John 3:36) Peter says in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

I am sorry to tell you that Satan not only is attacking God's plan of salvation outside the church, he is attacking it inside the church. Some theologians argue that Christianity and Islam, both of which are monotheistic religions and believe God used Abraham in his plan, have similar beliefs and worship the same God

In 2015, a major leader of a large Christian denomination made the statement that Christians and Moslems worship the same God. Not long after that, he said that Christians should not try to convert Jews because they are our brothers. This is blatant false teaching at odds with what the Holy Scriptures clearly teach. The Moslem's Allah has no son. Followers of Islam reject that Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. Radicals destroy our churches and tear down the crosses in them. Islam teaches that the doctrine of the Trinity is blasphemous. Islam implores its followers to obey the laws of the Qur'an in the hopes that they will be found worthy of paradise. Thus, it is really teaching that one gets to heaven by his good works.

When Jesus Christ entered into human history, there already were other religions in the world. What did he say? He said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:16-18)

What shall we do about the situation we face today? Let us pray for Christians everywhere, that more of them do not fall into error. Let us pray for non-Christians that they would hear and believe the truth and give up any false understandings of God. Let us even pray for our enemies, that the light of world, Jesus Christ, would become known to them. Let us, as much as is possible, love and care for those who believe differently from us, so that we won't be a hindrance to them in possibly believing in Jesus. Finally, as it says in Jude 3, let us "contend for the faith that was for all delivered to the saints".

And it may cost us. Several Christians gently responded to the website's publishing of the words of the song "One God" by saying they believed Jesus was the only way. Nobody asked why they believed that. Instead, people responded by calling them disgusting, bigots, and some other nasty names.

That's not even the worst of it. It is believed that overseas thousands and thousands of Christians have been tortured and killed by Moslem radicals, such as ISIS, and there are other groups as well. We need to be prepared, for we may be persecuted for standing up for Jesus. But read the Book! God more than makes it up to us in the end! And God doesn't want us leaving this place today with our chins on our chests or living in fear. Luther calls on us to be "little Christs", sharing the light of Jesus Christ wherever we have opportunity. Our Lord calls on us to live out our lives in joy no matter what! So let's do that, and let us always give thanks to God, who will give us the final victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

