

Tough Questions

Jesus Is the Only Way

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There are at least 3 different types of people sitting here today:..

First, when I say “Jesus is the only way,” you nod your head in agreement...

Second, you tend to agree but you also wonder why/if it has to be that way. You like it and you've been told it's right but you sometimes doubt it, something feels wrong with it.

Third, you think it's wrong. Maybe you think it's dangerous, or misguided, or just backwards religious nonsense.

No matter where you find yourself this morning, I'm glad you're here. And I want you to know that I know you have your reasons for feeling the way you do about that statement, regardless of where you find yourself.

Today what we want to consider is this: the essence of the Christian belief about Jesus as the only way, also referred to as “the exclusivity of Christ.”

I want you to at least see what it means,

why it is so essential to the Christian faith,

and why it is about far more than you likely think it is...

The best way to start is to get a clear picture of the doctrine we're considering. It just so happens that ECO, our Presbyterian denomination, has a handful of essential tenets or doctrines, and one of those actually speaks to this very issue.

Look at it with me:

*‘In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit
we are brought into right relation with the Father,
who receives us as His adopted children.
Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption,
the sole path by which sinners become children of God’
-ECO Essential Tenets, III.A.*

I want to use this tenet to set the scope of our conversation:

-up until this point, you may have thought “Jesus is the way to WHAT?”

-Heaven? Salvation? Eternal life? God? A Million dollar home? Happiness?

-Let's let our essential tenet answer:

Jesus is the only way to a “right relation with the Father, received as his adopted children.”

Jesus is the way to know God and to be in his family, That includes this life AND the next. With that in mind, our text this morning is from John 14:

John 14:1-7

“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. [IN THE UPPER ROOM] Trust also in me. 2 My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? 3 When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. 4 You know the way to the place I’m going.” []

5 Thomas asked, [] “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

6 Jesus answered, [] “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him.”

This is the word of the Lord: Thanks be to God!

I recently read an article looking at people who had spent their lives from childhood through adulthood rooting for football teams, their schedules shaped around weekends at the stadium or watching tv...

Article on losing fanhood

-That’s what I worry about for our beliefs

-You realize this is not something that should affect everyday life

-I don’t want you to wake up one day and go: what do I do this for? What is this worth?

-I want to show you why

Jesus as the only way to God should

Not simply be about a cold, impersonal doctrine that divides us,

It should affect everyday life.

It should move us closer to the heart of God and what we’re created for.

It changes everything.

Our first move this morning is to make a little more sense of this doctrine:

ONE | By walking the way to God himself, Jesus becomes the way for us. (v.1-5)

2 My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? 3 When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. 4 You know the way to the place I’m going.”

Our confession is that Jesus is the way to bring us into right relation with God.

Two important things to keep in mind here:

-He is the one who does it --prepares a place and "I will return to take you"
and

-He includes us in his family--uses an ancient near eastern family metaphor

-what the essential tenet claimed--***we are adopted into God's family through Jesus***

We believe he does this

both because of his work and his identity:

So,

His work: Jesus' death & resurrection reconciles us to God.

Romans 5:10 says:

We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, and, having been reconciled, we shall be saved through his life!

And his identity: this is something only God himself can do, and Jesus identifies as God in the flesh:

Acts 4:12: 12 Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved."

Jesus comes from God and he returns to the Father through Death & Resurrection,

And this Makes him the way for us to get to the Father,

To be in right relationship to God.

-his sacrifice makes him the way AND

-being God makes him the way

-This makes Christianity unique--it is the only religion where the key/decisive act is what God himself has done for us

This is where we intersect at a major level the claims that all religions are the same:

Christianity is unique in claiming that Jesus is the way to God,

And if you take what I've already said seriously--about God himself making a way for us to know him through the work of Jesus, you have to be honest and say Jesus cannot possibly be the way to any other vision of God.

Jesus is the distinct way to a distinctive God,

A God who desires to know you and love you and went to astounding lengths to make it possible to include you in his family.

We proclaim he is the only way because without him there is no Christian faith.

Both the person and the work of Jesus--him being fully God, and his actions--are the central identifiers of Christianity.

Rather than giving us a way, Jesus becomes the way.

He doesn't say "do this,"

He says "I've done this."

When he says to his disciples: "I will take you"

Its not so much a clarifier of the procedure that Jesus will use, but it is a statement that you don't have to find your way there.

Which should make us laugh at Thomas' statement and perhaps even our own lack of comprehension sometimes:

"But we don't know the way"

I mean, if someone said they're going to give me a ride,

I'm not stressed over directions..right?

And I think what we're seeing is the disciple's struggle to "get" Jesus

They're realizing that they have started following Jesus,

They've put their necks out there,

And if this is all true this is going to change everything...

TWO | When Jesus becomes the way for us, he defines all of life for us (v 6)

In v.6 Jesus says "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the father except through me."

It was important for us to get straight first on the meaning of Jesus as the way, because I'm going to argue that

This now defines reality for us. It defines everything for us.

If we are honest here this morning,

For a lot of us the hard question is not: Is Jesus the way?

The much harder question for us is: who is Jesus' "way" effective for?

Who does Jesus include and who does he exclude?

-or I if Jesus is the way to God, and ultimately the way to heaven, what does that mean for those whom we love who have not confessed Jesus as Lord.

I want you to be OK being uncomfortable with that. I think it's a good thing and hopefully in a moment you'll see why.

An important Biblical text for us is found in Romans 10:13

: For **"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.** (Romans 10:13)

-This passage is actually a quote from the Old Testament prophet Joel and both Joel and the apostle Paul, who writes Romans, are using this phrase not to talk about who is EXCLUDED but about the INCLUSION of non-Jewish people into the adopted family of God!

Now here's what I want to make sure you hear me say:

-Any human who is redeemed and brought into right relationship with God is done so only by the person and work of Jesus.

-Only God has the power to offer salvation, and to know and to declare who his salvation is for.

**We hold these two things in constant tension,*

-all we can say is what we've been told, and that is Jesus is the way, and apart from Jesus there is no way.

And what I want to advocate for here this morning is that this idea of exclusivity,

This idea of Christ alone,

Was never intended to create a sense of spiritual superiority (A),

or to draw lines (B),

or to even push us to question can God even be good (C).

I want us to recover the beauty of this idea. So think about this:

(A)-Christians don't relish in the exclusion of anyone.

The point of saying Jesus is the Way

isn't to celebrate that some people don't know Jesus.

And yet sometimes the way we talk about what we believe makes us almost seem braggy about the fact that some are in and some are out:

-I one time had a person, a professing Christian, tell me "there's a special place in hell for people who have done such and such.."

And my response was:

There might be a special place in hell for those who relish the idea of a special place in hell for others!

The Christian God is a relational God

And a sacrificing God, and he desires a relationship with his Creation. That is the context for which Jesus becomes the way.

Also know this:

(B) JESUS AS THE WAY DOESN'T DEFINE THE BOUNDARIES, IT DEFINES THE GAME

It's easy for us to think about "Jesus as the only way" as the barriers.

As what keeps people in or out.

But actually The idea of "jesus as the only way" should drive us to mission.

It defines who we are,

Defines our calling in the world as Christians.

It's not about us saying who's in and saying who's out,

It's aligning us with what God is up to in the world!!!

It should drive us to the heart of God.

(C)And I also want you to see that There's beauty in the exclusivity of Jesus
Jesus as the only way allows us to say that I belong, body & soul, to the God who created
me, and loves me, and desires to have a relationship with me...

-the beauty of the exclusivity of Jesus is that there's a way at all.

It is not the role of any pastor, theologian, or Christian to parse out who knows God, who
goes to heaven, etc.

We can faithfully and honestly say that is God's work and his role.

But we DO KNOW that God is a loving God who created us for relationship.

He loves his creation and desires a relationship with humans.

And when we declare that Jesus is the only way to know God,

We are not declaring that we got some religious golden ticket,

We are declaring that

There is a God,

And that he loves us,

And that there is a way,

And that his name is Jesus.

And that defines the world we live in--a world where we want that and seek that for
everyone.

Which leads me to the next thing I want you to see, and I think it further explains why we
as Christians proclaim that Jesus is the only way:

THREE | It is impossible to know the heart of God and miss on Jesus (v7)

**7 If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know
him and have seen him."**

Jesus is talking to Jews. They claim to know God.

And so Jesus claims to be God and he and the Father are one.

He is standing in front of his disciples and they're being challenged on whether or not they
actually love God.

-Because you can't know the heart of God and miss on Jesus,

Because he IS the heart of God.

Now we have some modern expressions of exactly what Jesus was dealing with in this
conversation with the disciples:

-We've all had those conversations, and maybe we are those people, where someone says "me and God are good."

Outside of Jesus this can't be true!

Not because Jesus is the magic formula, but because Jesus is the heart of God! So to be good with God but to miss on Jesus isn't possible.

The other way we often see this played out is in a lack of discipleship.

We may agree that Jesus is the only way to God,

But we haven't let that transform lives:

our past, present and future.

-if Jesus is the way,

That defines all of life,

Then he transforms ALL DIRECTIONS of life.

-he defines your past: the truth; your sins are forgiven

-he defines your present: you don't have to turn to any lesser love or salvation

-he defines your future: the way; you're created for something and headed towards something.

Jesus is not only the way,

He is the way AND the end:

Imagine in your head somewhere that you really like to go.

It might be your home. It might be someone else's home.

It might be in a sanctuary, you like the sense of sacredness.

It might be a theme park--Disneyland perhaps?

It might be the outdoors--the mountains or the beach?

When we think of Jesus as the "way," it's possible that what we imagine is that he is the entrance.

Like he's the front door you go through to enter the home,

Or the door to enter the sanctuary,

Or that he's the gate you go through to get into the wilderness or the park.

And he is.

But he's more.

He's also the home, the sanctuary, the park, the outdoors.

He is both the way and he is the destination!

He defines how you get there and

he defines where you're going.

The Christian faith hinges on Jesus -- Jesus fully mediates God to us.

He is The way - mediates our entrance into God's family

He is The Truth - mediates God's revelation to us

He is The Life - mediates salvation, he redeems us

Hebrews 1:2-3

In these final days, though, he spoke to us through a Son. God made his Son the heir of everything and created the world through him. 3 The Son is the light of God's glory and the imprint of God's being. He maintains everything with his powerful message. After he carried out the cleansing of people from their sins, he sat down at the right side of the highest majesty.

Jesus is the imprint, the EMBODIMENT
of God coming to us and offering us
His life
In His family.

This is what's distinct about the Christian faith.

God is not just talk, doesn't just offer a way,
Doesn't just provide a way...

He is himself the way.

This morning i want us to close declaring together a statement from the Heidelberg Catechism, which is one of our Reformed confessions of the Christian faith we believe:

29. *Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," that is, Savior?*

Because He saves us from all our sins, and because salvation is not to be sought or found in any other.

Let's pray