

“Believe in God; Believe Also in Me”

SERMON TEXT: John 14:1-14

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In the name of Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, who is not dead, but alive, who is not in the tomb, but is here with us now, with His love and His power, as He lives and reigns at the glorious right hand of God, our Heavenly Father. Dearly beloved, our sermon text for this morning is taken from our Gospel lesson. Let us pray...

O Heavenly Father we come before You trusting in Your promise to save us by way of Your Son's sacrifice in our stead, sanctifying us by Your sure Word, in the power of Your Holy Spirit. You have prepared for us the Way, having spoken Your true Word of pardon to us, the Gospel of peace, so as to call and claim us as Your own, unto everlasting Life. So, Father, we pray that Your Word, by which we come to You this day, would come to us once again and serve us as our stay. In Jesus' name: AMEN.

Dear brethren in Christ, in this world, there are many messages and many messengers. The so-called messenger of Islam is Mohammed and the message of Islam is one of submission to the will of Allah, the Sharī'ah— that is, the straight way, the path of Allah. Siddhārtha Gautama, the so-called Buddha— that is, the “Awakened One”— spoke of Four Noble Truths and an Eight-Fold Path or Way. Lao Tzu, in his book, the Tao Te Ching, or Dao De Jing, presented the message of the so-called Tao (道), or Dao— that is, “The Way”— stating from the start, in the book's opening sentences: “The Tao

that can be told is not the eternal Tao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name.” Yet, unlike Mohammed and unlike Siddhārtha Gautama and unlike Lao Tzu, Jesus did not claim to have come to merely show us the way. No, Jesus said, “I AM the Way.” Jesus did not claim to merely speak the truth. No, Jesus said, “I AM... the Truth.” Jesus did not come with mere words about living a noble life, or of merely looking for some form of life that’ll survive this one’s passing. No, Jesus said, “I AM... the Life!” Jesus is not the founder of our Christian faith— He is its foundation! Jesus is not Christianity’s messenger— He is its message! The name that we name, the name of God’s Christ, Jesus— whose name is literally God’s promise of salvation, ישוע— is the Way of God set forth from eternity, brought for us into time. God’s Word is His timeless Truth, and therein it is written, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Indeed, as it is written elsewhere, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal Life.” Yes, Jesus is not one who merely reveals the will of God to man; rather, He Himself is the very crux of the message of the cross. Whereas the bodies of Mohammed, Gautama, and Lao Tzu have long since turned to dust, our Lord is the Risen Lord who defeated death by His own death in order to bring us Life. So, His words are not hollow words; His Word is Truth. He is the Way. Yes, in this world, there are many messengers with many messages. Yet, there is only One who dares say, “I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” There is only One who says, “Believe in God; believe also in Me.”

There is only One who says, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.”

C.S. Lewis, over the airwaves of the BBC, at the conclusion of his defence of Christianity’s claims, had said the following about Jesus:

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 the 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 patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

The vast majority of the founders of all the other faiths did not claim to be God. Those few that did claim divinity, did little to nothing to demonstrate the truth of their claim as they too joined the others in the dust. Christ, however, is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Yes, Jesus claimed to be no less than God having come in keeping with God’s Word of promise. His resurrection from the dead is the vindication of His claim. This makes all the difference in the world because if His claim is true, then it follows that any and all other contrary claims about this world or the world to come are necessarily false.

Jesus said, “Believe in God; believe also in Me.” He also said, “No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Yes, Jesus’ claim is exclusive, that is, it excludes all other claims from any and all other religious figures, standing in stark contrast to the ways that

are presented as being true. Yet, this isn't exclusive to the Christ of Christianity. Ultimately, each claimant claims to know the true way to pursue in this life. Rabbi Schmuley Boteach, railing against the exclusiveness of Christianity, claimed, "I am absolutely against any religion that says that one faith is superior to another. I don't see how that is anything different than spiritual racism. It's a way of saying that we are closer to God than you, and that's what leads to hatred." Of course, such a position is utterly irrational. It is merely the product of a vacuous pluralism that rejects what can be clearly demonstrated as being reasonable because being reasonable would be politically incorrect. Yet, there is no way to avoid the logic that would lead us to the conclusion that not all religious claims can be reconciled and received as being true when they clearly contradict one another. For example, the rabbi rejects Jesus as being anything other than a mere man, rejecting also Jesus' status as someone who rightly reveals God to either Jew or Gentile. For the rabbi, Jesus is a false prophet. For the muslim, there is agreement with the rabbi when it comes to rejecting Jesus' divinity; however, Jesus is considered to be a true prophet. For the Christian, Jesus' own words and the overarching testimony of Scripture are clear: Jesus is no mere mortal. He is also not any mere prophet, but the very prophetic Word fulfilled.

Now, logic dictates that these three positions— that of the Muslim, Jew, and Christian— exclude one another, they simply cannot *all* be correct. Furthermore, the content of these and all other religions stand in opposition to Christianity when we consider the overall theme of their content. In truth, ignoring the specific differences that distinguish Christianity's competitors from one another, *all* other religions can be

classified as religions of law, contrasted against the unique content of Christianity's Gospel message. Whereas Christianity is centred around the person of Christ and what He has done for us, coming to save us through His all-sufficient sacrifice upon Calvary's cross, the message undergirding all of the other religions revolves around the individual's work, what they must do, or not do, along the way. They propose that when it comes to that which needs to be done, you must do-it-yourself. Good works, almsgiving, pilgrimages, and prayers in specific postures are all examples of the avenues available when making the attempt to appease God, or gods, or work toward whatever is found at the end of the way they set before their followers. Christianity, on the other hand, is God-given and God-driven. It is about God reaching out to us because, weighed down by sin, we cannot reach up to Him. An example of the difference between the Gospel and the religions rooted in the law can be seen in the comparison of two stories that share a common thread. Our Lord, through the parable of a rebellious son who set out to live a riotous life instead of a righteous life, presented the grace and mercy of a loving God who, like the father in the parable, is ever ready to receive and restore his returning son. It is a parable about reconciliation; it is a picture of God's good news. Now, a similar story can be found in Buddhism; however, the ending is what is most telling because it brings before us the fundamental difference between the two religious teachings. In this version, the rebellious son is not restored, but rather he must spend years in servitude so as to pay the penalty for his prodigal way. Again, with all these religions, upon closer inspection, we see the law, or some form of it, being presented as the way. Yet, Jesus said that *He* is the Way. He *is* God's good news to mankind. Even though this claim is

exclusive insofar as it excludes all other creeds, it is inclusive insofar as the Way is open for all men, for all who have lived, live, and are yet to live in this world that God so loves. This is the Way of the good news that rings true, cutting through all the lies—whether those of men or devils— and bestows the Life that is found alone in knowing the only true God and the One whom He has sent, being bound to Him by His Spirit.

Religions of law can only condemn us because our efforts, even our best efforts, will fail us. The Law that God has written upon our hearts, that which all men know, irrespective of the creed they claim, cannot be ignored as it condemns us, no matter how seared our conscience. Hence no one is excused. Furthermore, the works engendered by these religions are not works borne out of faith; and therefore, they cannot please God. Jesus' disciples were surrounded by pious Jews who looked to their upholding of the Law to justify them, even as they stood in the shadow of the temple and its testimony about sacrifice for sin. Struggling to make sense of Jesus' words about His being betrayed, handed over, and put to death by the hands of the Israel's priests, His disciples were troubled. His word of comfort pointed them to His promise, "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." These would be empty words were it not for what separates Jesus Christ from every other so-called prophet, guru, and philosopher— namely, His resurrection.

Dear brethren in Christ, as we continue in this season of Eastertide, we can cling to the promise we've received because Christ's resurrection marks every single claim as truth. Again, the tombs of all of the others are still full. Jesus' tomb is *empty*. His Word, therefore, is not. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me,"

Jesus said. "I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Jesus did not come to merely show us the way, but to be the way for us. He did not come to tell us what we want to hear, but to tell us what we need to hear, the truth about ourselves, our most urgent need, and about God's love for us, shown as He meets our need through Him. He came into this world, not to secure our lives to this place which will pass away, but so as to secure our place in the Life of the world to come, the world without end. "Let not your hearts be troubled," but heed God's Word to You: the Word of God's forgiveness, the New Covenant that was ratified in Christ's own life's blood. This Word is proclaimed to you. This Word came to you in Holy Baptism. This Word from the mouth of God is placed upon your tongue in the Holy Communion, receiving the Body and Blood of Him who receives you. His Word is Truth. His Truth is our Way. His Way is our Life. Amen.

May the Word of the Lord take root in your hearts and minds so as to bear fruit in your lives. Amen.