

# **St. Mary's Sermons**

**John 14:1-7.**

**Do all religions lead to God?**

We have been thinking a little bit about our text for the year from Romans 1:17. and we concluded that, although we are living in a country where Christianity has traditionally formed the basis of our society, this can no longer be taken for granted. Today Christianity is increasingly marginalised and those who openly promote their Christian faith often face a hostile reaction. Given what is happening in our society, I firmly believe that it is more important than ever before that we should not be ashamed to name Jesus as our Lord and our Saviour.

There is a very interesting debate taking place at the moment and recently the Prime Minister was arguing that Christians should stand up more for their faith. While this is welcome perhaps he had an ulterior motive of deflecting attention away for the criticisms of the Archbishop of Canterbury concerning some Conservative policies. Even the only Muslim in the cabinet this week gave an impassioned plea encouraging us to stand up for what we believe. Also this week at a gathering of multi faith leaders the Queen spoke powerfully in support of the need for Christians to defend their beliefs.

In light of a recent ruling by the high court that it was illegal for prayers to be said at council meetings, Brian Griffin asked for our prayers for the Eastwood Town Council meeting that was to take place on a Monday night. I can report that we carried on, with the support of the majority of councillors, to say prayers as normal at the start of the meeting. Thank you for your prayers which we appreciated and felt. I was very pleased to hear Eric Pickles, the culture secretary, report that they have now overturned this ruling making it once again possible for prayers to be said before council meetings.

This morning I want to explore two commonly held assumptions each of which, on the surface, seem plausible and attractive:

1. **It does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.** The problem with this, of course, is that you can be sincerely wrong. There are numerous examples of sincerely held beliefs that have turned out to be false, for example: For many years people believed that the earth was flat and, perhaps the most powerful recent example is Hitler who sincerely believed that he should eradicate the Jews resulting in the

killing of some 6 million people. Hitler, of course, was sincerely wrong and every one today would agree that he was wrong.

2. **The assumption that all religions lead to God.** It seems to me that this is one of the main reasons why many Christians today have a profound loss of confidence in openly sharing their faith with others. One chaplain is reported to have said, "We are being sacrificed on the altar of multi-faith political correctness". I would argue that there is an awful lot of confused and muddled thinking about this whole issue and it is impossible in a short sermon to do justice. However, if you want to look at this subject in more detail then I would recommend that you read the helpful chapter in the book "Searching Issues" by Nicky Gumble or, if you want a more detailed overview then there is a good book by Michael Green entitled "But don't all religions lead to God?"

The picture, that is often used to purport the latter, is of a mountain that has many different routes to the summit so it doesn't matter which route you take to get to the top. If this view is correct then it is logical to conclude that we have no need to tell other people about Jesus and they can simply continue to practice their own faith - eventually they will get there anyway. If you push this view to its logical conclusion you end up with universalism - the belief that in the end everyone will be saved any way. I do not see how you can possibly hold this view and remain faithful to what the bible teaches us about who Jesus is.

As Christians I would suggest a different analogy which is much more helpful and nearer the truth: The real situation can be compared to people trying to find their way through a maze in which there is just one path to successfully negotiate the way out whilst the majority of paths are dead ends that lead nowhere. I don't know the answer to the obvious question, "What happens to those who don't find the right way?" What happens to those who have never heard about Jesus? Unfortunately, in this sermon I cannot explore all these questions in detail but adopting the position that Jesus is the only way does not mean that we should write off all other religion as misguided or worse still

demonic. There is much more we could say, but one thing I do know is that God will be completely and utterly fair when He judges us.

If you stop and think about it for a moment, it is totally ridiculous to conclude that all religions lead to God when they have such diverse aims and objectives. How can all religions lead to God when they make such contradictory claims about: Who God is, what happens after death and how you obtain the goal? Some Buddhists do not believe in a God at all, Islam makes Him so far removed as to be unknown and the goal of Hinduism is “extinction after many reincarnations” and sanctions idolatry on a massive scale. This brief overview of some of the major world religions is, of course, far from exhaustive. We could certainly add many more different faiths to the list but that would only complicate the picture even further. When you consider all the varied and diverse claims that different religions hold it is completely impossible to maintain the view that all religions are of equal value.

I want to suggest two other powerful reasons why all religions cannot possibly lead to God:

Firstly, the nature of God must be, by definition, the source of all that exists. The prophet Isaiah put it this way. “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, like dust on the scales.”

When we appreciate just how majestic, awesome and big God actually is, how can we possibly climb up to him? It just can't be done! Michael Green wrote, “Far from all religions leading to God, **no** religion can lead to Him. He is too great. The **creature** cannot possibly discover the **creator** unless he chooses to disclose himself. We do not need a religion but a revelation and that is precisely what Christianity claims to be. Unlike other holy books, the bible does not record the story of human beings in search of God, but God in search of human beings.”

The second reason why it is impossible for any religion to ever reach through to God is because of our nature; It is not simply because of the nature of God. The bible paints a very unflattering picture of what we are actually like, but one which is uncomfortably near the mark. Rather than being the good people

we often assume ourselves to be, we learn that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. You only have to look at the news to realise that this is true. Although there is much that is good in us there is also something profoundly twisted in our nature and, as a result, we do not want God interfering in our lives - we want to paddle or own canoe! And even if we do try to search for God there is still the ball and chain of our own wrongdoing that drags us down. All of us fail to be good enough to deserve to have a relationship with God. The greatness of God and our sinfulness are two massive reasons why all religion do not lead to God.

Although many people would argue that the claims of Jesus are arrogant we must not simply dismiss them. On Saturday morning I often listen to a programme on Five Live called "Fighting Talk", a humorous, topical sports panel show hosted by Nick Hancock, in which, during one of the rounds the contestants are asked to defend the indefensible. As Christians we are not being asked to defend the indefensible concerning the claims that Jesus made about himself. Jesus was never worried about offending other people - he was more concerned with the truth.

By always living to please his father, by dying in our place and by rising from the dead, Jesus proved to be just what we need in order we can find forgiveness and be put right with God so that we can enjoy the personal relationship with him that we were created for. Jesus' words are not just empty and meaningless; he went on to prove that they were true. No one else could ever make the same claims that Jesus did. He could legitimately say, "I am **the way the truth the life.**"

Mark Stibbe writes, *"In a world which values political correctness this is offensive. Jesus is unashamedly proclaiming the scandal of his particularity. Jesus will not accept religious pluralism, (that all roads lead to God). He will not accept theological relativism (that all religions are relatively true). He will not accept spiritual consumerism (that all forms of religion and spirituality enhance our lives). Jesus uses the definite article. He is not politically correct; he is prophetically direct. So often the church is quite on this issue. Frightened of offending others we have whispered that Jesus is a way, a truth, a life. But it is*

*time for us to rediscover our voice. Yes we must say it with grace but let us start declaring the truth about Jesus- that he is the way, the truth and the life”.*