

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Some years ago, back in California, I had a conversation with a woman who was convinced that all religions lead to God. She questioned me about John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,'" she asked if it were possible this was a mistranslation. So I looked it up in my Greek New Testament, the language of the original New Testament, and translated it myself. I saw her later and told her that "no, this was a literal, word-for-word translation." She wasn't happy with my answer, but she couldn't argue with the translation.

Now other folks have also asked me about this over the years, and I have always answered with "no." I've explained my answer, and my literal word-for-word translation in a kindly manner, but there is no other answer I can give as an ordained Lutheran pastor who is called to preach the Word and when needed, give a defense of it. Plain and simply, I believe what Jesus tells us.

The truth is, all religions are not alike and not all religions lead to God. Some religions are based on someone's ideas, some are based on events that are historical. Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a common root based on Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but in only one, in Christianity do we find that God is love. In 1 John 4:16 we read "So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world that God so loved, that all who believe in him may not perish but have eternal life.

All who believe in him, in other words, all who have faith in him, a gift by the grace of God, because God is love. Jesus Christ died on the cross for you and I while we are yet sinners, he died for us on account of love. Because of love, God is not willing that any should perish, but all come to repentance and be saved (from 2 Peter). Now we, you and I, don't always show the world that we are Christians, because sometimes we leave behind Christ's command "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

Now when you actually compare religions, and the religious teachers honored as founding or starting some religions, you find a great deal of contradiction between them, some teachers had no belief in a god at all, others have quite different views of what god, if there is one, must be like, and what one must do to be saved or reach nirvana or paradise or whatever the goal is. One religion has castes where some are considered "untouchables," and a person is constantly reincarnated until he or she "does it right." Yet another teaches that everything happens by the will of god, while yet another has it that humans have no real identity and share sentience with rocks and trees and everything else.

Now we believe that God became incarnate and dwelt among us, sharing with us in temptation, hunger, and everything that human beings go through. And the Son of God who became flesh and lived among us suffered the consequence of our sins, and died on the cross, conquering death and the grave for us, his mercy, grace and love for us.

A long time ago, late 60s or perhaps the 70s I would see bumper stickers that announced "I found it!" I was never sure exactly what had been found, but I knew it couldn't be God because God isn't and never was lost, he instead has found us, the lost, seeking us, saving us as because he is our Good Shepherd who watches over and cares for his flock.

Jesus tells us he is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life," now think of a "way" as a bridge that connects two points, think of a "way" as healing divisions, think of a "way" as bridging the gulf between us and God the Father. Because of sin we have been separated from God, we born in a state of sin, separated from God, and in effect separated each of us from everyone else, even separated from whom God created us to be. Jesus is the Way between all these divisions, between us and God the Father, between each of us and each other, between us and who we were created to be.

You know, I have crossed a great many bridges in my life, some regularly such as the Dumbarton Bridge, the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge all in California, I've crossed over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in Maryland, and I've crossed the Key Biscayne Bridge in Florida. I've never been tempted to try to swim one of those distances, not at all.

Of course why would I? The bridges are there to be used and we know from our gospel that the gap between us and God the Father has been bridged by Jesus. He is the Way and the Truth and the Life, and he tells us that no one comes to the Father except through him and he himself is our bridge. And God is love!

AMEN