

February 2016 Newsletter

JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY

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Jesus is the only way to salvation. Period. Few concepts are more inflammatory and criticized today than the Christian belief that Jesus is the only way to God and thus salvation. Such an exclusive statement may grate on postmodern ears in our pluralistic culture, but it is true nonetheless. As Jesus said, with love and full confidence that what He taught was true, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Christian evangelism, done by biblical methods, is the loving act of presenting the Good News of Jesus through Scripture, reason, evidence, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit. By our words and deeds we show that Christianity is true and people everywhere need Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. As Christians we are to practice tolerance, which is we respect other people who hold beliefs with which we disagree. But what are we to do when leaders in our denomination no longer believe the fundamental tenet of Christian belief that is central to the mission of the church—the proclamation of the Gospel? The Presbyterian Church (USA), founded in 1983, refers to itself as a "big tent." An apparent reference to its policies of "inclusive-ness and diversity." What happens when the main pole holding the big tent up is yanked from its center? The whole tent comes crashing down. Reports from Presbyterian Panel's "Religious and Demographic Profile of Presbyterians" (PC(USA) bi-annual polling) has reported an alarming trend: Presbyterians who believe "Jesus is the only way" are leaving in vast scores for more Christ-centered and Bible-based Presbyterian denominations (Evangelical Presbyterian Church and ECO: Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians). The growing number of Presbyterians who remain are questioning and even rejecting the church's ancient teaching of the centrality, uniqueness, and exclusivity of Jesus.

The Presbyterian Church historically has long affirmed, "All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set Him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the one that is to come." Yet this foundation to the Universal Church is being chipped away within our North American denomination. In terms of giving insight into the current division within the PC (USA) and the exodus of evangelical churches, consider the following statement from the 2013 poll of PC (USA) pastors: "only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved."

Among clergy in our denomination, 45% disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. Put another way, almost half of all my fellow ministers would disagree or strongly disagree with what I preach every Sunday! Following the 2013 poll, Perry Chang, administrator of the Presbyterian Panel said, "There seems to be some Universalist streak in Presbyterianism, where some Presbyterians are open to the idea of other paths that folks in other faiths might be taking."

There is a reason the Church has always held strongly to the teaching that Jesus is the only way and why it must continue to do so.

The Bible teaches that there is no other way to salvation than through Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself says in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." He is not a way, as in one of many; He is the way, as in the one and only. No one, regardless of reputation, achievement, good deeds, special knowledge, or personal holiness, can come to God the Father except through Jesus.

Jesus is, and always has been, the center of the Christian faith. It's not centered upon ethics or spirituality or morals or philosophy or nationality or anything else. Christianity is about Christ Jesus. Across time and around the world His disciples have held that He uniquely reveals both the purposes and character of God and, simultaneously, what it means to be truly human. As God in human flesh. Jesus is the singularly unique and authoritative point where God steps into human history with unprecedented clarity of who He is, why He came, and what He desires.

It is essential that those offended, troubled, or confused by this reality—be they within the church or outside—understand that those holding it to be true do so with no desire to offend, condemn, or hurt. We do not confess Jesus is the only way out of arrogance nor judgment, but from the desire to be faithful to His calling to “go and make disciples of all nations.” The Church of Jesus for 2,000 years has grasped this idea for a very simple reason: Jesus himself taught it. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have known me, you will know my Father too” (John 14:6-7a).

The New Testament interprets the meaning and significance of Jesus' life, explains the implications of his ministry and finished work on the Cross, and reaffirms these words through innumerable passages. Rev. Dr. Mark Patterson writes, “Over 20 centuries, creeds, hymns, works of art and literature, testimonies, sermons, and prayers have joined this refrain proclaiming that Jesus is not one among many, but singularly the greatest and most beautiful One.”

The reason for this is simple: Jesus has captured our hearts. The riveting accounts of His compassion and love, His healing touch, His courageous stands against injustice, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy, His brilliance expressed in simple stories, His fulfillment of prophecy, and so much more, describe a man unlike any the world had seen before or since.

Jesus has captured our hearts! Having broken the power of death and paid for humankind's sins, we know He is more than a great teacher, a good historical figure, or a moral example, but He is the living and present Lord. And because He lives and is present, as the Kingdom comes and God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, we witness the effects: giving hope to the hopeless, breaking the power of evil, healing addiction, righting injustice, mending brokenness, bringing light where there is darkness, welcoming in the outsider, providing for the widow, orphan and homeless. We have seen countless miracles, changes, and events that can have no other source than the presence of Jesus at work among the world He loves. We have joined followers of Jesus from all over the globe united in the joyful certainty that the Jesus of the Bible has been present among us, has blessed us, and is powerfully, and certainly real—He is the way, the truth, and the life, and the only way to the Father.

I believe we walk in the way of Jesus when, in a respectful and thoughtful manner, we listen to others who do not believe as we do. This is Good News that needs to be shared. Our mission is “to glorify God by being and making disciples of Jesus Christ.” That is why it grieves me to see so many within our own denomination fail to understand why this belief is precious and essential.

We reject culture's desire to reduce Jesus to but one way among the many and instead remain convinced of His singular, unprecedented, unsurpassed Lordship. This is the faith of the Church and this will remain the anchor of Neelsville Presbyterian Church.