

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 3, 2009
St. Timothy Lutheran Church
Grand Island, NY
Acts 4:5-12

“The Line in the Sand”
by
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In great epic movies, there comes a time in the drama when the hero leader draws a line in the sand and challenges his followers to make a decision. As for himself, he is going forward. As for the troops, the crew, the posse (whichever), each individual member must decide whether to cross the line and go with the leader or turn around and go home.

For you, I want to draw a similar line in the sand. The line in the sand I wish to draw is this. On the one side is “Jesus is **the one** by which to be saved;” on the other is “Jesus is **one of the ways** by which to be saved.” Which one is true? On which side of the line will you stand? You decide.

I believe this is the most important question facing the Christian church today. Certainly, it is the most important question facing the church in America. That includes the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Likewise, it is the most important question facing you the individual. including those of you who already consider yourselves “Christian.”

For both the church corporately and people individually, the defining struggle, the struggle with ultimate consequences, is over the question: **Is Jesus the one by which to be saved; or, is Jesus only one of the ways by which to be saved?**

You are apt to say: “Pastor, I learned of Jesus when I was young. I was baptized. I’ve gone to church most of my life. I have always considered myself a Christian.”

I would say back to you: “Yes, but the question is: Is Jesus the way to salvation? Is Jesus the one by which you can be saved? Does it matter, **ultimately**, whether you are ‘in Christ,’ (i.e. a Christian), or is it just as good to be a Muslim...a Hindu...a Buddhist...or, perhaps, a secular humanist or, simply, someone who is ‘spiritual.’? Might not all religions be equal paths to the same destination? What matters **ultimately**?”

Jesus said: “I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved.” (John 10:9)

Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” (John 11:25)

Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:5)

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:8-12)

You and I, and the whole world, are left with the question:

Is he **the one**? Or not?

Is Jesus that important? Or is he not?

Is he the one by whom we access heaven? Or not?

Is Jesus of Nazareth of ultimate importance? Or not?

or, a variation of this, Does Jesus of Nazareth have ultimate importance for me, but not necessarily for the other?

Bottom line: Is it true, “There is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:12)? Or, is it not true?

How you answer that question affects everything you believe and do. It affects everything St. Timothy does or sets out to become in its Next Generation St. Timothy.

As for me, I say it is true. I believe Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. I believe those who believe in him, even though they die, will live. I believe Jesus is the gate. I believe in Jesus.

You may object. You may say: “That is all well and good for the person who has the chance to hear about Jesus, to come to know Jesus. But, what about the pygmy in deepest, darkest Africa? Or, what about my neighbor who grew up in a Muslim household and never had the chance to learn about Jesus? Is Jesus still **the one**?

My answer is:

He is still **the one**.

He is still the one because

- (a) I know no other way; nor have I been given any other way by which to be saved.
- (b) Furthermore, I have not been authorized to profess anyone else, or any other way.
- (c) What has been revealed to the world and what has been given to me is:
 - (1) There is a God.
 - (2) This God created all things.
 - (3) This God created everything to be complete, to be whole; not to be incomplete, broken, or dead eternally.
 - (4) People’s rebellion, fracturing of relationships, sin results in death, brokenness, incompleteness and less than what was intended to be.

- (5) God was and is not willing to settle for that. He did and will take steps to mend, to fix, to restore what is broken.
- (6) And, finally, while God may select any method He wants to accomplish this, God has acted in Jesus to heal the world. That is all I know. That is what I have been authorized to proclaim.

Jesus is the one!

In saying that, I realize that it is not for me to assign anyone to heaven or to hell. There is no license for me to be disrespectful of others or to appear intolerant. But, neither is it for me to be reticent in offering Jesus to the world. He is the name under heaven, given among mortals, by which we are saved.

For me, this is where I draw the line in the sand. I believe everything in the church rises or falls on the answer given to this question.

I challenge each of you, individually, and you, St. Timothy, to engage in a pursuit of your answer to this question. It is a deep topic that thinking people ponder often. It may be a topic that is controversial. It may be a topic that disturbs you. It is likely a topic which will require considerable time to process. I would invite you to engage me and others in a discussion of this matter in the months ahead. In fact, I would invite you to engage me in some dialog immediately following this service.

For right now, however, what say you? Is he, or is he not, **the one** through whom salvation is given?

I say he is!

[PRAYER]