

Sermon for October 26, 2008

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Luke 4:16-21

Title: "Christianity: Jesus IS the Messiah!"

Introduction: These past few weeks we have been looking at the four major world religions besides Christianity. We have looked at the history of the religions, found out more about their sacred writings, talked about their basic beliefs and then we've compared and contrasted them with Christianity. In this series, "World Religions and the Gospel Truth" we have had a chance to grow in knowledge about what other people believe.

If we are going to carry out the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28 = "Go into all the world and make disciples ... baptize ... teach...") we have to know to whom we are speaking to about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how to say it in a way that is understandable!

We have taken time to look at the religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. I hope you have gained knowledge about these religions as well as having a chance to go deeper in understanding of the Christian faith. I hope and pray that we, as followers of Jesus Christ, recognize that we have something to offer the world through our faith base.

Yesterday I was at a meeting for churches in our area and I had a chance to sit at a table with some people from LaFarge. I got to meet a man that my Dad served on the School Board with back when I was just a tot. See, I lived in LaFarge until the summer after my 3rd grade year. My Dad was the pastor there for six years. Do you want to know what he is famous for in LaFarge?

When we moved there, the church was in bad shape. There was always water in the basement and the place smelled like mold. Besides that, the church building was packed every Sunday ... no room. So, my Dad asked his District Building Committee if the people could build a new church building. They didn't think that was a good idea because there was no way that community could afford a new building.

So, guess what R.A. convinced the people to do? Well, here's how it went. Supposedly, the District Superintendent was passing through Viroqua and the pastor there said, "Wow! R.A. and those people in LaFarge are really going to town on that building, huh?!?" Response = "What?!?" "R.A. and the people in LaFarge are tearing down that building quickly!" The D.S. drove through LaFarge, took a couple of pictures of the one wall still standing and left ... didn't talk to my Dad.

My Dad then called the D.S. and asked, "Can we build a new building now?" His bosses had a hard time arguing with him. They built a new building. They paid off a 20 year loan in 10 years!!

Why? Why did my Dad take the risk of tearing down that building? Why did my Dad risk his appointment to build a new building? Because he knew that that building would be a tool used to build the Kingdom of God. What I grew up with was a man who understood "whatever it takes"! "Whatever it takes" to serve Jesus Christ!

Why have I adopted that saying? Because I believe it is worth doing "whatever it takes" when the lives of people in our community, our neighboring communities and our

part of the State of Wisconsin hang in the balance. What we have to offer offers people life! When we don't offer Jesus, we are taking life away.

Well, before we go any further, I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find our scripture for today. On the other side you will see a brief outline of how we are going to begin talking about the Christian Faith. My hope is that you will hear or see something today that will help you grow in your faith and/or help you to share your faith with others.

Let's start with our Scripture for today. According to Luke, what we are about to read took place soon following Jesus baptism and temptation in the wilderness near the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We are in Luke 4...

READ LUKE 4:16-21 NOW AND PRAY!

I. What Christians Believe

It has been said that everything that Christians believe has been summed up in one verse from out Bibles. All that we believe is said in John 3:16 ... "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believed in Him would not die but live forever." That's it in a nutshell! All that we come to church for, all that we learn in our Sunday School, youth group and Adult Education Classes ... that's the lesson!

A. The Nature and Character of God

1. Each of the world religions we've studied has had something to say about God.
 - a. Buddhism = God exists, but is a non-factor in our world.
 - b. Hinduism = God/Brahman is an impersonal force.
 - c. Islam = God is the Almighty and people are to live out Allah's new word (AD610ff).
 - d. Judaism = God is giver of the Law ... all about justice and obedience.
2. Christianity = begins with LOVE. God's love is the starting point for Christianity.
 - a. We are created to be in relationship with God.
 - b. God "so loved the world" that he sent Jesus.
 - c. Everything we believe comes out of this idea!

B. The Human Condition

1. According to John 3:16, we believe that God acted by sending Jesus in order to save us from death. God was acting to solve a problem. The problem is simply this ... SIN.
 - a. We are created in God's image and we are good ... we can love people and be kind and caring.
 - b. BUT, if we are honest with ourselves, we cannot ignore the sin part.
 - c. Sin is the foundation for tragedy, hurt and difficulties.
 - d. We are all born with 'Sin-Potential'.

- e. When we were kids, no one had to teach us to lie or be selfish. It came naturally!
- 2. Other faiths recognize sin, but none take it as seriously as Christianity does. Let's take a closer look.
 - a. Old Testament =
 - i. Adam and Eve at the wrong fruit.
 - ii. Cain killed his brother Abel because he was jealous.
 - iii. People of Babel built a tower to be gods.
 - iv. Abraham lied about his wife to save his tail.
 - v. Moses killed a man.
 - vi. David committed adultery.
 - vii. Peter lied about his relationship with Jesus!
 - b. We are very much the same... we too have 'Sin-Potential'.
 - i. We wish we had each other's stuff.
 - ii. We feel hate toward others.
 - iii. We are prideful and prejudiced.
 - iv. We know the speed limit is 55 and we drive 60.
 - v. Why do we love to criticize others, but can't take it?
 - vi. Why do half of all marriages end in divorce?
 - vii. Why do we get caught up in materialism and struggle to part with our money to help people in need?
 - viii. Why is it so easy to tell 'little white lies'?
 - ix. Why with all the technology and know-how we have do human beings still have to go without adequate food, water and health care?
 - x. Why do we still think weapons are the right way to settle differences?
 - c. We struggle because sin comes naturally. We like life to be 'about us'. We are selfish!
 - d. Christianity not only recognizes that we are sinful; we also recognize that there are consequences for sin...
 - e. Sin harms us. Sin harms others. "Oh no! My sins never hurt anyone else!" Get your head out of the sand!
 - f. Our Sin Separates us from GOD!
 - g. Sin leads to war, crime, pain, hurt and ultimately DEATH—physical, spiritual, emotional ... eternal!
- 3. BUT, Remember that God loves us! God saw our human condition and wanted to make a difference. God had a plan.

C. God's Plan

1. Humanity is sick. We've got serious problems ... and one of those serious problems is that we are no longer connected, because of our sin, to God.
2. The Gospel Truth is like a remedy, a vaccine for the human condition. God wrote out a prescription for our fatal disease.
3. It started with Abraham. God told Abraham that Abraham and his descendents would be a light to the world ... people would see God's relationship with Abraham and the Hebrew people and choose to follow God and be blessed.
4. Several hundred years later, God decided to be a little more specific. God laid out specific expectations of humanity through Moses. Once the people received the Law from God through Moses, they acted like most of us ... let's go 62. I'll never get pulled over for doing 7 over!
5. Then God sent prophets who encouraged the people to follow God. "God has a plan that leads to life. Follow God's plan or bad things will happen to you."
6. The people killed the prophets and didn't listen to what they said and consequences came ... including losing Abraham's land and having to move to many different territories and countries.
7. Christians believe that God decided to address the problem of sin once and for all ... God wanted to transform the people from the inside out. God would start with just a few people who would see and understand the Remedy for Sin. They would share it with others until all people would have a chance to be healed from the ailment of human sin.
8. The Remedy? God chose to become one of us. In the person of Jesus, God became human and was born as a normal fully-dependent baby. God experienced the scrapes and bruises and freedom of childhood. God experienced adolescence and early adulthood. God, in Jesus, knew temptation, hard work, sweat, blood, frustration, love, friendship, struggles and betrayal.
9. When Jesus was crucified, he knew what it was like to feel alone and separated from God. That's an important part of what we believe ... God experienced what we experience.
10. BUT, Not Only did Jesus come to experience what we experience, but also that we would have a chance to understand God.
 - a. As we follow Jesus' life, we get a glimpse of Who God is.
 - b. Those three years showed us what God's heart looks like ... think about who Jesus spent time with.

- c. When Jesus taught and healed and cared and told stories, we get an idea of what God is all about.
- 11. Ultimately, Jesus was a victim of the evil of humanity.
 - a. He was beaten, mocked, spit on, tortured and died a humiliating death ... for one reason; US!
 - b. God showed how people who call themselves righteous do not even recognize God when He is right in front of them ... we do the same, don't we?
 - c. Jesus death was the ultimate sacrifice ... like the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament. Jesus death took the place of mine ... sacrifice.
 - d. I don't know about you, but I try to recognize that when I sin ... asking for forgiveness is not like asking for a lollipop ... the forgiveness I ask for comes with a price. Jesus suffered for my sins. What I read about Jesus going through (beatings, mocking, whipping, nails into the cross) is what I deserve.
- 12. Finally, the story doesn't end with Jesus on the cross ... that was Friday. Sunday's coming!
 - a. Jesus promised he would be back on the third day... Sunday's coming!
 - b. Not only did Jesus prove to be the Son of God, but also showed us that death is not the end for you and me!
 - c. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" (John 11:25).
 - d. Jesus Resurrection = good over evil, grace over sin, God over Satan and life over death. We Have Hope!

D. Our Response

- 1. In the other religions we've talked about, there was always something that the person had to do to earn their way to nirvana or non-existence or eternity. Not so with Christianity. All we have to do is accept what Jesus has already done for us as a gift.
 - a. Anyone here have a hard time receiving gifts?
 - b. I have received gifts from people in this church that I certainly do not deserve. But, those gifts were given, I believe, from sincere appreciation for something I have done.
 - c. I have three choices: 1. Don't accept it. 2. Try to pay for it and probably insult the person, or 3. Accept it with as much humility and grace as I can muster ... BUT, that's hard!

- d. That's what God wants us to do ... accept the gift of salvation with humility and thankfulness. Not easy for us.
 - 2. "What must I do to be saved?"
 - a. Repent of your sins.
 - b. Believe in Jesus Christ.
 - c. Accept the gift of salvation...
- II. Christianity According to Other Religions – What have I learned about Christianity by learning about other religions...
- A. Hinduism
 - 1. Hinduism's view of the unknowable God is a far cry from the God we learn about in our Bibles.
 - 2. With good karma and bad karma ... Jesus good karma covers all my bad karma.
 - B. Buddhism
 - 1. Buddha reminds us that all of us will get sick, grow old and die ... its part of life.
 - 2. But, I don't have to run from that or try to ignore the feelings of angst.
 - 3. Instead of thousands of lifetimes trying to get to the point of being extinguished like a flame; I can look forward to a "One and Done" and on to Paradise!
 - C. Islam
 - 1. I am grateful that, according to Christianity, God did not send another human prophet that might mess up the message from God.
 - 2. God sent God's self in human form ... so we would get to know God!
 - 3. Unlike in the Quran, Jesus calls us to love our enemies and neighbors and be willing to lay down our lives for others.
 - D. Judaism
 - 1. By studying Judaism, I was able to become even more convinced that Jesus is the Messiah the prophets talked about and the Hebrew people were promised.
 - 2. I love the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. But to me, it's like reading a book up to the exciting part and somebody ripped out the rest of the pages ... the story is not finished without the New Testament.

Next Week: I want to talk about six (6) of the many reasons that I am a Christian...

Let's Pray!