

## Jesus IS the Only Way

*A Door County Advocate "Faith perspectives" column – January 6, 2007*

Christians who believe what the Bible says (and, actually, there are no other real Christians, are there?) embrace the words of Jesus in John 14:6 – “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus made the claim that the only way to a right relationship with Almighty God is through himself, the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. There is, in effect, a period and not a comma after Jesus’ claim of exclusivity. He does not say something like, “No one comes to the Father except through me, unless of course he or she comes to the Father some other way, like being a really good person or sincerely believing other teachings or following another religious leader, because, after all, there are many roads to heaven and what’s really important is believing something.”

If you take Jesus at his word, you believe that he is the only way to God, the only way to heaven. So I am stunned when I hear professing Christians, and especially vocational ministers, soft-pedal the truth claims of Christ and downplay the in-your-face statements like we read in John 14. Either Jesus is the only way to heaven or he is not, and he says he is. Why is it that professing Christians hem and haw when it comes to quoting Jesus?

Such an occasion occurred at the state funeral for former President Gerald Ford. The Episcopal priest who preached the homily at the service preceded his remarks by reading the wonderful words of John 14, words I have used at many funerals. Here is how it goes in the English Standard Version: [Jesus said,] "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." And there the pastor stopped. He stopped halfway through verse 6. He did not finish the text with Christ’s claim of exclusivity: “No one comes to the Father except through me.”

I was stunned to hear him conclude the reading where he did. But I was not wholly surprised. Many professing Christians do not like to tell this biblical truth: Jesus is the only way to heaven. It can sound harsh and uncompassionate. It is perceived to be intolerant. Some think it sounds unloving. But the really unloving thing is to withhold truth from people and to let them continue on a path that leads them away from eternal life in the presence of God. If I believe the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation forever and I soft-pedal that and sort of shrug my shoulders or, by my silence, give tacit agreement to another person’s “pursuit” of God apart from committed Christ-following, or if I conclude a Gospel reading before the hard saying of the Savior, I am not telling the truth and I am not loving my neighbor.

In an effort to be perceived as compassionate and not to appear intolerant, more than a few professing Christians err on the side of “inclusiveness” when the one they call their Lord is very clearly “exclusive”. I do not have all the answers, and I am okay with questions and a good deal of ambiguity; there are many question marks in the Bible and some things are hard to understand (as the Bible itself teaches). But I am called to believe, teach, and preach what the Bible says is true and not what some might wish the Bible says is true. Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” This is for God’s glory and it is, indeed, for our good.