

One Name

2018-04-14 - Year B - Easter 3 - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas
Acts 4:5–14; Psalm 98; 1 John 1:1–2:2; Luke 24:36–49

Tolerance

- There is a single word that has come to dominate much of the conversations that we have and the decisions that we make in our culture. That word is “tolerance.”
- Tolerance, in essence, is a good thing. “Tolerance,” originally used with regard to religious tolerance during the protestant reformation. Yo-yo back and forth between protestants and catholics. Reign of “Bloody Mary.”
- When considered in these terms, tolerance is a very good thing. Many years after the reformation, our own country was founded largely on a foundation of tolerance and Religious freedom, for example, Puritan pilgrims.
- Unfortunately, tolerance has taken on a new meaning in contemporary society. Today it means full acceptance of all ideas as equally true and valid. This is an entirely different and dangerous animal!
- Think about the word itself for a moment. If I say that I am tolerating something or someone what does that mean? It is not usually used in a positive light. “Allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (something that one does not necessarily like or agree with) without interference.”
- Religious tolerance today is not tolerance at all. Tolerance in its true meaning is something we all should practice, tolerance in its contemporary meaning is something that, as Christians, we cannot practice.
- To believe that all religions are equally valid, or that all religions get you to the same place is to believe a lie. This is what we call relativism, or pluralism.

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- People like to look at Jesus as one of the “great moral teachers” and put him in the same category as Confucius, the Buddha, Mohammed, Gandhi, and others. This allows them to pick and choose what they like about Jesus’ teaching and leave the rest behind.
- This is not a new line of thinking. C. S. Lewis was articulating a response to this during the Second World War.
- C. S. Lewis’ trilemma: liar, lunatic, or Lord.
 - “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about [Christ]: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”
- In the lesson from Acts today Peter says this, (Acts 4:11-12). Christianity is either entirely true, or entirely false but it doesn’t leave any room for the idea that all religions lead to the same place. Jesus said “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the father but by me” (John 14:6).
- There truly is only one name by which we must be saved, Jesus Christ.

The Urgency of Evangelism

- This puts us face to face with the harsh reality that many of the people we know and love in our everyday lives are in spiritual peril. You may have friends, or family members, or co-workers who don't believe, and they are in danger.
- As Christians we are on a rescue mission. The charge that we have been given comes from Jesus himself. (Luke 24:46b-48) We are to proclaim his name to all nations because there is no other name by which we can be saved. "You are witnesses of these things" (v. 48).
- Sharing our faith might be a scary thing for some. We might be scared of what they will think of us. That they might think we are strange or weird. That they might think that we are intolerant.
- Peter and John were arrested and warned not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Their response was this (Acts 4:18-20). The world may not always like us for what we have to say, and while this is a hard thing, we must remember that we are a people on a rescue mission.
- But as you go, make sure that you always "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Tolerating the falsehoods around us while at the same time gently pointing to what we know to be true.

Spirit Led, Spirit Powered

- One final thing, we must perform our mission not on our own strength but in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). Without God we can do nothing but with him all things are possible.
- Story of my first lawn mower, a rusty old reel mower from my grandparents basement. On our own we are like that mower, but with God we are like a shiny new John Deere tractor.
- Look at the impact of Peter and John – Acts 4:13 - "uneducated, common men" who spoke the truth with power.
- You don't have to go to seminary to be able to share your faith with a friend or neighbor. All you need to do is be a witness to what God has done in your own life and let the Spirit lead you and empower you.