

St Mary's Fetcham, Surrey
Sun 23rd Oct 2011

HOT POTATOES # 2

What's so special about Jesus? Do all religions lead to God?

Scripture

John 4:1 - 30
John 14:6



Sermon outline

- 1) The secular view on religion. The diversity of religion. The uniqueness of Judaism and Christianity: God seeks man. The fact that Christianity is not special to non-Christians.
- 2) The church meets Islam: the experiences of vicars trying to build relationships with Muslim neighbours in mixed communities.
- 3) The theoretical view: exclusivism, pluralism and inclusivism. How can a loving God not want to save all? What of those who through no fault of their own have not heard of Jesus?
- 4) Studying the Bible and striving to live as Jesus taught us.
- 5) Bringing it all together - two views:-
 - a. Keith Ward: God will give up even on those who died having chosen not to follow Jesus and no one can say how long he will try for.
 - b. Lesslie Newbigin: Our first objective has to be to live and relate to one another as Jesus taught. Jesus showed love and tolerance of others. Our interpretation of passages such as John 14:6 has to be in the context of such a community of faith.

The sermon will be accessible from the St Mary's website:

www.stmarysfetcham.org.uk

Resources for further reading

The Word of God	Ward
Between Naivety and Hostility	Chapman and Bell
Distinctly Welcoming	Sudworth
But Don't All religions lead to God?	Green
John for Everyone (Part II)	Wright
The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought	McGrath.

Suggestions for Home Groups

What follows are some optional questions for discussion in groups.

What's so special about Jesus? Do all religions lead to God?

1. If you had been born in a Muslim country, would you have been a Muslim?
2. Does God answer the prayer of people of other faiths?
3. What was the Old testament equivalent of having faith in Jesus? Why is it not still a route to salvation?
4. At the moment many people worshipping at St Mary's have partners who do not come to church? As society becomes more "multi-faith" how should we respond to worshippers whose "other half" is - for example - a Muslim?
5. Martin Luther said "do not confuse defending your territory with defending your faith". How deeply rooted are our ideas of being Christian and being British?
6. Might some of Jesus' parables appeal more to a Muslim culture than others? To what can the gospel message transcend culture? Is the problem with the stories or "the way we tell them"? (John 4: 1 - 30.)
7. In what ways can we try and bring someone with a strong faith who is not a Christian to Christ without offending them?
8. Keith Ward questions why the "door to repentance should be closed by the rather arbitrary fact of earthly death". What do we think of the idea of God never giving up his desire to save even after death?
9. Tom Wright warns that if we acknowledge routes to salvation out-with Christ we "dethrone Christ and enthrone something else". Is this fair?
10. We have become used to the fact that the Bible requires interpretation; few interpret all stories, metaphors and parables 100% literally. It has been said that when we read the Bible we eavesdrop on words meant for different people in a different culture in a different age? Is John 14: 6 open to interpretation?

Roger McKinlay Oct 2011.