

**Sermon for Pentecost 7**  
**July 8, 2018**

**“Is Jesus Really the Only Way?”**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom God raised from the dead.  
Amen.

Dear Christians, it seems like, these days, you can't watch the news without hearing the word "tolerant" or participate in a heated Facebook discussion without someone throwing out the insult, "You're intolerant." Tolerant and intolerant. Those are popular words these days, and so are their cousins: inclusive and exclusive. There's a big push in our country to be inclusive of all kinds of things that people want to do.

That puts you under some pressure, doesn't it? You'd like to be tolerant and inclusive, but yet, there's things you can't compromise on.

Churches are under that pressure too, to be tolerant and inclusive. A church with a bad reputation will have a hard time gaining and retaining members. If a church has a reputation for being intolerant and exclusive, that's not good for business.

That puts you under some pressure, doesn't it? You're members of this church, and what you do and say is factored into the reputation of this church. You're identified as being a part of this church. You'd like your church to have a positive reputation in the community and be considered a desirable place where the love of God is preached and lived.

But what do you do when you run into a situation where the thing called "tolerant" is sinful? How do you handle it when the idea called "inclusive" is a lie from the devil that will lead people to hell?

Let's make it more real. Is it considered tolerant today to say that Jesus is the only way to heaven? Is it considered inclusive to say that all other religions lead to hell?

Because if you say that, if you stand up and say, "Yes, I believe what Jesus says in John 14:6 'I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" You can expect to be called intolerant, exclusive, unloving, mean, hateful, bigoted, and that you have the intelligence of a caveman.

So what do you do when you're in the hot seat, you're on the spot, and you've got an opportunity to share God's truth, even if it will be met with resistance? Let's take a look at the example Peter gives us when he was being interrogated in Acts chapter 4.

Just a little background to make sure we're all up to speed on what was going on. Peter and John, two of Jesus' close disciples, went to the temple one afternoon to pray. By the gate, they saw a man who was lame, he couldn't walk and he was unemployed and poor and sat by the temple gate begging for money and food to stay alive. Peter and John stopped, and Peter said to him, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I will give you. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, get up and walk!" And the man was miraculously healed, and crowd gathered, and Peter began preaching about Jesus. But the religious rulers and leaders were unhappy about that, sent in the temple guards, arrested them, threw them in jail, and the next day interrogated them. The religious rulers did not want people talking about Jesus or promising things in Jesus' name.

Peter was under some pressure, along with John, because he knew that these powerful men did not like what he was saying. They had armed guards and a jail at their disposal. They had the ability to ruin Peter's life if they didn't like his answer.

Before we get to Peter's answer, I want you to notice an important phrase. Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit." That's an important phrase. Jesus once promised, "When they bring you before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourself, or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you should say." That phrase about Peter invokes the promise of Jesus. It puts God's stamp of approval on Peter's response. It helps us as a case study to answer the question, "What would God have us do in this world that wants tolerance and inclusiveness that go against God's Word?"

Peter said, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.

Peter didn't back down at all, did he? He still gave the credit, clearly and plainly, to Jesus, and wasn't afraid to point to the Bible as proof. He didn't back down that Jesus was raised from the dead. And he concluded with this statement:

"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

That's a very exclusive statement. It wasn't popular with the people Peter was speaking to, and it's not popular in much of our society today. It doesn't pass the test of being popular, tolerant, or inclusive, but it passes a more important test: it's true.

And that's where Peter could have so much confidence from. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised, and he knew and believed the truth of Jesus.

Jesus is unique. He's the eternal Son of God, he's glorious, perfect, and holy. He loved us. We celebrate at Christmas that Jesus had left heaven behind, took on human flesh and grew in Mary's womb, and was born. Jesus lived exactly the kind of life that God wanted. He obeyed his parents. He was polite, friendly, helpful, kind, hardworking, generous, loving, caring, and comforting. His Father was proud of him. God the Father, on two occasions, was so proud he didn't hold back, but spoke from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well-pleased." God the Father put his stamp of approval on Jesus. Jesus had lived a God-pleasing life, and then he gave up his life on the cross as a sacrifice to God, using his perfect life to pay God for all the sins of the whole world. God the Father put his stamp of approval on Jesus' sacrificial payment, too, by raising Jesus from the dead back to life. And Jesus instructed his followers, his disciples and us, to be his hands and feet and mouths to go all around the world sharing the good news of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus.

So what would you say? Is God tolerant or intolerant? Is God inclusive or exclusive? It's both. Let's explore that by remembering that we are saved by grace, through faith.

We are saved by grace. There's nothing that we did or could have done to make God love us or make God send Jesus or force God to tell us about Jesus. And the same grace with which God love you, he loved everyone in the whole world. You're probably familiar with the passage, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son..." Who did God love? The whole world, by grace. It doesn't get any more inclusive than that, does it? And God's love for the world didn't just lead him to send Jesus to be the Savior, but he also sends out his message into

the whole world through his Church. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." It doesn't get any more inclusive than that. God's grace is for everyone; Jesus forgiveness is for everyone.

But there is only one way to connect to God and receive all those benefits and blessings from Jesus. We are saved by grace, through faith. Faith is the connection to God that all those blessings flow through. Faith is the knowledge of Jesus' work, and the trust that what Jesus did is for you. Jesus is your Savior. That's exclusive, like what Peter said, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved." If a person doesn't know Jesus, they cannot be saved. If a person knows about Jesus, but does not believe in him, they cannot be saved. If a person trusts in someone else, they cannot be saved. The truth is that Jesus is the only way to have eternal life and be welcomed into heaven by God the Father. That's an exclusive message. It's a good message. It's a true message.

Tolerant or intolerant, inclusive or exclusive? Those words are so often used as if they are the litmus test for right and wrong, but that's not quite accurate, is it? What people often assume is that tolerant equals loving and inclusive equals loving. But that's not accurate. So let's answer a better and more important question: as a person who believes in Jesus as the only Savior, how do you show love?

It might be tolerant to leave your atheist neighbor be, and not invite him to hear about Jesus at your church, but it would not be loving. You might be accused of being exclusive if you telling your Mormon friend that the Mormon church does not know the way to heaven, but you be showing love to your Mormon friend by warning him. You might meet a lot of resistance, or be frustrated by a long conversation, but the Jehovah's Witness at your door needs to know the love of the true God too.

In fact, that inclusive grace delivered exclusively through faith in Jesus, that's the reason this church exists. If there were other ways to heaven, why bother? But there's only one way, and it's big enough for everyone, and so you've banded together into this church, to keep yourselves believing and to invite others to believe too. [And you think that kids need to know this and believe this too, so you've got your own school as a place where your kids and others from town get to hear about God's grace that comes through faith.] And because you know the one way to heaven, you've got a purpose for your whole, to spread the good news of forgiveness and salvation through faith in Jesus for, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved." Amen.

**Text:** Acts 4:8-12

*Peter preaches a bold sermon with the exclusive way to heaven.*

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, <sup>9</sup>if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup>let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed. <sup>11</sup>This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.

<sup>12</sup>"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."