

“Don’t be narrow minded!” John 14:1-14

“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. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

Today in our Gospel reading we happen to have these scandalous, these offensive words of Jesus. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” How could you say this, Jesus?! But, we can’t get around these words, they are in our Bibles, so we’ll focus on them today.

We’ll try to understand what was Jesus saying, what was He claiming and what does His claim mean for us today, and how does this claim of Jesus shape our Christian life and actions.

I guess almost everyone has heard at least some venomous comments about these words of Jesus from someone who doesn’t belong to the Church, or even from someone who calls themselves Christians.

They may sound like this. How can you still be so narrow-minded in 21st century? How can you be so arrogant to think that only you Christians have all knowledge and wisdom? How can you be so unloving, so intolerant, so self-righteous that you reject all others, as if only Christians have got it right?

What about Hindu, Muslims, Buddhists, animists, atheists, and so on? So they all are bad, you are only good people, right? You need to get over this and see the world as educated people do, not as some kind of old fashioned fundamentalists.

Have you heard any of these? Said in this way, or another. Now I could almost invite you to raise your hands those, who want to be narrow-minded, arrogant, unloving, intolerant, self-righteous, uneducated, old fashion fundamentalists.

I won't raise my hand, for I really don't want to be perceived this way. I guess you don't want it either. What can we do? Let's just shut up, let forget about these hard, but very clear words of Jesus, and be broad minded, loving, tolerant, educated, and so on ... by doing what?

By saying that, of course, basically there is no real difference between different worldviews. They are all basically the same. They just differ in minor issues – in what they teach about God, about creation, about sin, about heaven and hell, and about salvation. Otherwise they are the same. How foolish...

Then by doing this we will sound... Yes, how will we sound? Hmm? Ignorant... just repeating this foolish mantra what surrounding culture, which is so hostile to the Gospel, imposes on us.

Let's take a look at what Jesus really said and what does it mean. What Jesus claims, and what entire Bible claims, is very clear. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Act 4:12) "No one comes to the Father except through Jesus."

This message is spelled out as clearly as possible, so that we are sure that this is exactly what is claimed. This is God's message to us. We haven't misunderstood it. That's exactly what Jesus claimed and what His apostles taught to all nations.

Does this mean we reject that there is wisdom and knowledge and understanding in other worldviews? No, that's not what we say. Yes, we believe that there is a lot of wisdom, and knowledge and understanding in all cultures, religions and worldviews.

Good moral guidelines, good and insightful observations about human nature and society. Wise suggestions how to lead a good life, and so on. We admit that one can find them everywhere. Of course, it's obvious. It is called wisdom, when people observe what order the Creator has establish, and what kind of creatures we are and learn how to live accordingly.

But then, why would we trust these Jesus words that He is the only way to God? Do you think that those who follow other great teachers like Buddha, or

Muhammad, or Confucius, or someone else, do you think they can't get to the Father in heaven?

Let's clarify few things. When we talk about wisdom, of course, there is wisdom and there are wise people in every culture. But when Jesus said He is the only way, He didn't speak about wisdom or knowledge, He spoke about our salvation. That He is the only Savior, the only way to true God.

What is salvation? We can try to define it as the ultimate goal, ultimate purpose, ultimate destination, re-union and fellowship with God. Jesus says that only through Him we can enter into fellowship with true God.

Let's see what are other options. Those who want to accuse Christians of being narrow-minded contend that there should be many to salvation, many saviors. Not just Jesus, but also Muhammad, Buddha, and so on. And here their unfortunate ignorance is revealed.

None of these so called 'great teachers' ever claimed to be our savior. None. Go and check it. None of them even claims to be our savior. What they do is to teach how you should live your life to earn or achieve your salvation. What principles you need to follow.

That's it. I'm saying it in all seriousness. None of founders of any religion, or philosophy or ideology claims to be our savior, they only teach you how to save yourself. You see, this is the key point. Listen carefully!

The choice is not between different saviors, between Jesus Christ and someone else. No! The choice is between Jesus Christ and ... you. That's right, either you accept God's plan for your salvation, or you reject it and say that you will do it on your own, following teachings or principles given by some of these so called great teachers.

That's our choice. To accept what God has prepared for you, or to reject God's offer and to say, I'll do it my way. That's the true choice. There are no other options.

What Jesus says in these scandalous words is not something narrow or unloving. Contrary to that. Just think about it. Who is the One who said these words? The Son of God, Eternal Word, who humbled Himself and came to us as a man, who revealed to us that true God is our loving Father, who desires our salvation and fellowship with us more than anything.

Jesus came to bring the ultimate sacrifice, to lay down His life to conquer death on our behalf. He showed His sacrificial love giving His life in exchange for ours. For your life, so that you can have this chance for salvation.

We'll never be able to comprehend fully what happened on the Cross when God Himself died and rose again. This is a mystery far beyond our comprehension. But we have this clear message of the same God, that now, because of what Jesus did for us, God the Father forgives you all our sins, He accepts you as you are, unconditionally, He promises you salvation and eternal life together with Him.

This message is as clear as possible. So that everyone can be as sure about God's attitude to us as possible. It is revealed to us in Jesus, His Son. So that we have no doubt that God is gracious, merciful and loving God, faithful to His promises.

It is clear, it is delivered to us in our human language, by God Himself. Besides, it was not only delivered by God Himself, but He also prepared and sent His disciples as His messengers to all nations with these good news about what God has done and prepared for us.

This clear and wonderful message has changed the history of our world. It stands at the very center of our time, as fulfillment of God's promises. This message, clearly proclaimed has changed cultures, this message created our Western Christian culture, fruits of which we so abundantly enjoy today.

Let me sum up it one more time. God, knowing that there is not a chance for us to find a way to Him, nor even a desire, for we better prefer to be gods ourselves, He came to us, humbly, He prepared the way for our salvation.

He did it all, and now He invites us to come to Him, so that He can bless us and bestow all the gifts, temporal and eternal, to us. He keeps sending His messengers to all the nations with this invitation, His messengers keep sacrificing their lives to deliver this message and our culture wants to call it narrow minded and unloving!

Instead they propose, to shut our ears, to pretend that God hasn't acted and spoken in history, that He is not speaking to us today through His word and His messengers, but to accept that we can find God and get to him on our own, by following some kind of useful principles for good life.

They propose us to shut up, not to share these wonderful news with everyone, but instead allow all people find their own way to God. When you realize what our culture demands from us, from messengers of Jesus, it really portrays quite scary picture.

They want to shut their ears to God's message, they want to choose lies and death, and they want to prevent us from revealing the truth that could bring people to the life, out of misery of sin and death. How about that? How can you name it, if not an arrogant rebellion against all that comes from God.

You see, once we spend at little time trying to unpack what this fuss is about it becomes very clear that the problem is not in what Jesus so clearly said. He just revealed God's loving heart to us and invited to receive true life with God as unconditional and infinitely precious gift from our Father in Heaven.

Jesus proved the legitimacy of His claims not just by miracles, not just by demonstration of His unlimited power, not just by fulfilling all prophecies, but also by His triumph over death, His resurrection in body and appearance to several hundred eyewitnesses. This is our history. Well recorded history.

Here we can see how strong is sin and devil, how much they can fool and blind us that we are ready to reject what is so obvious and to cling to lies that are so unreasonable. That's shocking and sad...

Once we see that Jesus message is true, what does it then mean for us? It changes everything. It means that you own the most wonderful news in the world. God the Creator of Universe loves His little and rebellious creatures and shows His love coming to us, talking to us, desiring to bless us, to bless you.

And not just those who already have heard this message, no, there are no limits for His loving heart. He wants all people to come to the knowledge of the truth and to be saved. By all people meaning all people.

All who still live in false hopes that they can find true God on their own. All who live their life as if this time is all that there is. All those who are burdened, in despair, with bad consciences, lonely, suffering, working hard and bringing painful sacrifices to appease their idols of money, sex, power and fame. This message is for all of them. They all desperately need it.

This message comes for free. No merits required. No following some principles. Just accept God's offer and all that is His is yours. When you begin to realize what kind of person true God is, how much He can and desires to give you, it changes everything, then you begin to understand that there is no better place to be than in the Father's house, in His presence.

We can have a glimpse of it here already, in the Divine Service, in the loving community of saints, but that's just a glimpse. But the day comes and is not far away, when Jesus Christ will return to take us to the Father's house, where we already have a place prepared. These are the most beautiful news.

These news are the life and light for the world. They change everything. We are not even worthy to speak so great things. But gold is gold even if kept in clay vessels. And the truth is the truth even if spoken by imperfect creatures like us. The message we have is the power for salvation for everyone.

By grace of God you have received and excepted this invitation of God, you have stepped on the way to the Father, you have heard this truth that gives life to you, and no one can take it away from you. No one can snatch you from Father's hand.

But there are so many who still wander in darkness, confused in lies and heading towards death. Let's be broad minded, let's be loving and respectful, let's be wise and share these wonderful news with them.

Exactly as we heard apostle Peter: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Imagine, just imagine, how good it will be to dwell in Father's house, in renewed earth and heaven, with all its splendor, without sin, in presence of Christ, together with those who receive this life through your testimony.

Amen.