The disciples knew it was real. Perhaps one of the most compelling arguments for being a Christian is the fact that the church exists. When Jesus was taken away and crucified, the disciples scattered in fear. They were hiding out and didn’t want to be found. They were terrified they would meet the same fate as Jesus. That was one day. Three days later they went out and changed civilization with the gospel of Jesus Christ! How do you explain that? Jesus did rise from the dead. He did appear to the disciples. He did empower them to grow the church and he still empowers the church today!

Another reason I am a Christian is that God’s love revealed in Christ is the most powerful force in the world.

The Right Attitude of Christians

Now, let me say a word to those who believe this and are Christians. We must be very careful of our attitude to those who are not Christians. Yes, we must evangelize. Yes, we must be working to make disciples. But we have no right to act arrogantly or exclusively. Remember in the New Testament God in Jesus is going to the ungodly. In Jesus’ stories it is the religiously wrong who get praise. The Good Samaritan is religiously wrong, has the wrong version of the scripture, worships improperly, but in Jesus’ story he is closer to the Kingdom. In Matthew 8 it is the pagan centurion who has faith greater than any Jesus had seen in Israel. In Luke it is the Samaritan leper or the ten who were healed who only had faith and are made well (Luke 17).

Watch out in the NT! The outsiders become the insiders and the worst of Jesus’ judgments are on those religious folk who think they are the only insiders (Matt 23). Believing that Christianity is the truth and that other religions are not never means Christians should hate or despise or condemn people of other faiths. The closer we follow Jesus, just the opposite occurs. We are led to be more accepting, more loving like Jesus was. We must hope for the best for them because God claims them too. Christ died for them too. And, as the Bible makes perfectly clear, there are surprises at the judgment. In Matthew 25 it is those who feed the hungry and clothed the naked that are saved. In Romans 11 Paul makes it clear that all Jews will be saved. If Christ died for them, if there is hope for them, if God is going to treat them in the same way he treats us, then we better treat them in the same way, hoping that they will also be in the Kingdom.

My Answer

At the beginning of my sermon this morning I told you about the question I was asked by the student in the class – “Why are you a Christian?” I never told you my response. I said, “I’m a Christian because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

To those of you here who are not Christians allow me to say this - the same Word, the same God who created the heavens and the earth, the same God in Jesus, the same God who created you, dwells among you today and is knocking on the door of your heart. This God loves you. This God wants to heal the broken places of your life and make you whole. This God wants to put a new Spirit within you. This God wants to give you new life. It’s the truth. Will you open your heart and let God in? Amen.

Confirmation Sunday is always a special day in the life of the church. When young people make a public profession of faith in Christ and commit to the church it is a beautiful thing to behold.

As I reflect on this importance of this day, I feel led to ask this question: Do you know why you are a Christian? Say you went to brunch after worship and the waitress could just came from church and asked, “Why are you a Christian?” Would you be able to respond? Would you know what to say? If so, what would you say?

I have always loved this text from 1st Peter: Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. - 1st Peter 3:15

I recall being invited to speak to a college class some time ago at my Alma Mater, Florida Southern. The class was doing a sociological study of religion and they wanted a Protestant minister to come speak and answer questions. I was glad to. They peppered me with all kinds of questions about church administration, worship, preaching, and pastoral care. At the end of the class as we were about to wrap up, I young lady in the back raised her hand and said urgently, “I have a question!” She asked pointedly, “Why are you a Christian?” I mean, I’m taking this class on comparative religions and there are so many beautiful religions. What makes Christianity so special?” The girl next to her chimed in and said, “Yeah, don’t all religions lead to the same place?”

My guess is that many of you here today have wondered the same thing at one level or another – Are all religions the same? Don’t all paths lead to God? Maybe you have loved ones or friends of a different faith and it is hard for you to believe that you are right and they are wrong. Or perhaps when you are at the water cooler at work or out to dinner with friends you find it difficult to articulate why you are a Christian. Maybe you wonder why you chose Christianity among all the other religions of the world. If they all lead to the same place, what difference does it make, right?

These are certainly questions more and more people are asking in our culture. We live in a post-modern age which is defined by relativism. This means that our culture does not believe in absolute truth. Truth is whatever works for you in your life. So, there is pressure all around us to put all religions in the same basket and mark it “spiritual.” The culture tells us that all of it is basically the same and all of it is good for you. So, like good consumers, many people pick and choose something spiritual that works for them. Some buy the New Age book “The Secret.” Others get into Eastern philosophy and religion. Madonna and other celebrities get into Jewish mysticism and study the Kaballah. They try it on. They try it out. If it feels good, they buy it. If it doesn’t they throw it away or they go back and exchange it for something else. We live in an age of designer religion, of consumer spirituality. As a lady said to me at a fancy dinner party, “You’re a minister, right? Well, like sunshine and Vitamin C, I believe a little bit of religion can be good for you.” There it is. Get some religion, any religion. It’s all the same. It can be good for you.

So, are all religions the same? Do all paths lead to the same God? Are all religions just different paths up the same mountain? Well, I am going against the grain of our relative culture this...
morning and responding with a resounding “No!” All religions are not the same. All paths do not lead to God. How can I be so sure? Because I have studied them. Just a quick study of world religions will show that they are not the same. But don’t take my word for it. Let me show you.

**Different Gods**

In Evanston, Illinois there is a famous structure called the Bahá’í Temple. It is a fantastic piece of oriental-looking architecture with nine sides and nine windows. The vision behind it is that while there is but one sun, that sun can shine through nine different windows, just like the nine great world religions point to the One God.

This all sounds nice, until you begin to compare the views of the great religious teachers honored in that temple and you find that they contradict one another. Some of the great religious teachers were actually atheists, believing in no personal God at all, while others had very different views of what God is.

Traditional Buddhism believes there is no God. Buddha did not believe in God. Buddha only believed in the reality of suffering, and the only way to avoid suffering is to live your live untouched by anyone or anything.

Hinduism teaches that God is a non-personal entity that is part of everything. In fact, Hinduism teaches that I am God, that you are God, that this pulpit is God. And everything in this world is a manifestation of God except the fact that you are God. And the only reason why we keep being reincarnated into this illusion is that we are being punished for not realizing that we are God.

New Age philosophy and religion believes in a fickle God that can be manipulated by us to get what we want in life. New Age thinking believes that God can be molded into what we want God to be.

Christianity believes that God is a personal being revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Christianity believes that God can be molded into what we want God to be. God is Holy Other. God is God alone. Do all paths lead to the same God? Obviously not.

**The Purpose of Life**

Now that we know that many religions have a different understanding of God. What do other religions believe about the goal or purpose of life?

Those who follow New Age philosophy believe that history is a war between forces of light and darkness, but we have no assurance as to which of the forces will win in the end. Buddhism teaches that this world is nothing but an endless cycle of sufferings, and followers of Buddha can only hope for Nirvana, which is an extinguishing of consciousness where personal identity is destroyed. Hinduism teaches that the world is basically unreal and that before long this world and all who live in it will return disintegrated and leave no trace, assuring us that history and our lives have no significance. Our culture teaches us to be very afraid, look out only for yourself. Don’t trust anybody. Only the strong survive. You only go around once so those with most toys wins.

Christianity teaches that God is going somewhere with us, and he will destroy evil and death. Christianity teaches that God wins, so what we do with our lives is significant! Christianity teaches the God will redeem us and this world and establish God’s Kingdom on earth.

You see, try as our culture might, we cannot reconcile, we cannot lump together all paths, all religions to the same God, to the same essence.

Donald Stroble reminds us that “we cannot reconcile the Hindu belief in a caste system which says that some people are born ‘untouchables’ with the Christian belief that every human being is a person of sacred and infinite worth. We cannot reconcile the Buddhist notion that the human self has no real identity or individual significance with the Christian insistence that becoming one with Christ is a fact before God is of primary importance. We cannot reconcile the Muslim view that everything that happens, be it good, bad, or indifferent, is ‘the will of Allah,’ with the Christian belief that our lives are not in the hands of a blind Fate, but rather in the hands of a loving God. We cannot reconcile the Hindu notion that the soul is reincarnated again and again until at last it is purified and breaks from the law of karma with the Christian teaching about the resurrection of the physical individual unto life everlasting.” We cannot reconcile any of it. All religions are not the same. All paths do not lead to God.

**What Makes Christianity Unique**

All of this may seem sense to some of you. But maybe the most compelling question about this has not been answered. Perhaps you wonder “How do you know, how do I know, that the God of Christianity is the true God? How can you be so certain that the Christian way is THE way?”

Well, let me put it this way. Suppose a person who cannot swim is thrown into a lake. What is the best word Confucius has for the drowning man? “Profit by your experience.” What is the most helpful message the Buddha has for him? “Struggle.” What is the most encouraging teaching of Hinduism for the suffering man? “You may have another opportunity in the next life.” What do the gods of our culture say (pleasure, money, sports)? “Just be thankful for all the good times you had.” But what does Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, say? “Take hold of my hand. I will save you!”

Every other religion is humankind’s search for God. But in the Christian faith, a faith unlike any other, God in Jesus Christ comes searching for us! Religion and spirituality try desperately to make a path to God. You see, Christianity is the ultimate truth because we could never, on our own, understand who God is or save ourselves. God knew that God must come to us to reveal the truth and save us. Christianity is really not a religion, it is a relationship. This is why I am a Christian. The story of Christ is the story of God reaching for us.

In most religions, human beings are reaching for God. Only the Christian faith claims that God reaches for us. In Christ, an invisible God penetrates the veil of time and space. I grew up in a strong Christian home. Some of my earliest memories are of a church nursery. Church was not only a big part of my family’s life but it was also a big part of southern culture. But as I got older I began to learn about other religions and wondered why I was a Christian. When I was in high school I asked many of the same questions I have lifted up in this series. So, I studied everything I could get my hands on about all the religions and philosophies of the world. After all my reading, studying, and researching I was glad I was a Christian. I reaffirmed my commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Shortly after this, God called me to preach! What did it for me? God worked in my life in many different ways. However, a big part of it was a small passage I read in the Bible, from the little book of Colossians.

Colossians 1:15 reads, “He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God.” This verse plainly tells us that Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus shows us who God is! This is what separates Christianity from all religions of the world. Buddha never claimed to be God. Confucius never claimed to be God. Mohammed never claimed to be God. Moses never claimed to be God. But Jesus did. He said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father... I am the way, the truth, and the life...” You see, in every other religion people are just guessing as to who God is, but only the Christian faith says, “You don’t have to guess at who God is and what God is like. All you have to do is look at Jesus. Jesus shows us everything we need to know about God.” The biggest thing Jesus shows us about God is God is love.

This love of God is fleshed out more in Colossians 1:19-20: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross.” Wow! This means that Jesus not only shows us what God is like but in Jesus God redeems us and brings us into a transforming friendship with God. Only the Christian faith makes that claim about God – God comes to earth as a human being to bring us into relationship with him.

This is why God came to us in Christ. So you can try other religions and do guess work about who this higher power is and what he wants with you. You can guess at what the purpose of life is and how you will become whole as a human being. When you are in trouble or experiencing difficulty you can reach and grasp for some impersonal force out there to help you. Or you can allow God to reach for you in Jesus and give you hope and new life in relationship with him. You can sense God saying to you, “Stop struggling. I’m here. I love you. This is who I am.”

This is why I believe in God. This is why I have chosen to follow Jesus. This is why I am a Christian. When I look at the cross and see God in Christ bleeding for me and gasping for breath and realize this is how much he loves me, I know in my bones it is real.