

Sermon for Sunday, May 4, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO 63105

"GOD'S ONE WAY STREET"
St. John 14:1-7

Last week an organization called Jews for Jesus asked to use our facilities for a training conference that lasted all day Saturday in which they trained those who were interested in how to share Jesus, especially with Jewish people. Since Central has supported this organization financially in the past, it seemed appropriate for us to permit them to use our buildings. In addition, we invited Moishe Rosen, the founder and president of Jews for Jesus, to speak to our Sunday evening Celebration Service. When he was in St. Louis two years ago, we had held a special service and several hundred people attended the meeting.

However, before the meeting Saturday a week ago and before Mr. Rosen spoke on Sunday evening, a number of Christian ministers under the leadership of a Presbyterian Pastor issued a statement which they had signed to the effect that Christians should not have a missionary effort directly aimed at Jews. According to this statement, such an effort was an insult to the Jewish people and implied that the religion of Judaism was inadequate. This statement was quoted in at least one of our St. Louis papers and the Presbyterian pastor who initiated the statement and who apparently hand delivered it to the reporter, indicated to the reporter that Central Presbyterian seemed especially friendly to Jews for Jesus. That's true! The reporter contacted me about our involvement with this organization and I would like to share with you a part of the statement that I released to him.

First, I said that our congregation supports a number of organizations whose primary objective is sharing Jesus Christ with all kinds of people from all walks of life with all kinds of religious orientations. For example, we support Campus Crusade for Christ, Inter-Varsity, and Young Life, all of whom emphasize evangelism. All of these organizations are trying to win people to a commitment to Jesus whether they are Jew or Gentile, Buddhist or Moslem or nothing. If seeking to win people to Jesus implies that whatever religion they have is inadequate, then that's right. So we support a number of missionary enterprises all around the world whose purpose is sharing Jesus with people. Just as we support a missionary to Brazil to share with Brazilians, so we support Jews for Jesus to share Christ with our Jewish neighbors. We care as much about the Jewish people having an opportunity to hear about Jesus as we do Brazilians or Africans or any other peoples. We love our Jewish neighbors just as much as we love any other peoples and because we do love them, we want to share with them.

Jews for Jesus is not the only organization whose purpose is evangelism that we allow to use our facilities. As a matter of fact, there is an announcement in your bulletin this morning advertising the use of our facilities by a group called the Navigators. I hope you will sign up--it may be too late--they can only handle about 350 and they are probably already full. Other groups such as Campus Crusade, Inter-Varsity, and Young Life have also used our facilities. We have never attempted to single out just Jews as an object of our efforts to share Jesus, but we have not excluded them either and as long as I am pastor we are not going to start.

The reason we do this is twofold. First, as we read in our Scripture lesson this morning, Jesus says of himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." So Jesus claims that he is God's one way street, he

is the only way to salvation. We didn't invent that claim--you didn't invent it--I didn't invent it. That isn't our statement, but that is the statement of Jesus himself. As a matter of fact, if I had invented a religion, I probably would have invented one that would be a lot easier to do all the things you ought not to do. I probably would have everybody get saved except maybe the Russians; maybe the Iranians, too! But fortunately, the religion of Andy Jumper is not the issue here. What is at issue is the statement of Jesus himself. He said he is the only way to the Father. Now, if we are going to believe in Jesus, we have to take that statement very seriously.

The second thing Jesus said was this: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations--now that doesn't exclude anybody--baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (St. Matthew 28:18-20) Again, in Acts 1:8, the Bible tells us that Jesus was with his disciples for the last time. He gave them a command and this is what he said: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be--not you ought to be or you might be or you may be--you shall be my witnesses. Now notice that Jesus envisioned a mission to the Jews--you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth." That was the vision Jesus had.

So, first Jesus says that no man is to come to the Father but by him and second, that we as his followers are to make him known to all peoples to the far ends of the earth. Now, if I understand plain English, and I think I do, nobody is excluded from those statements. There are no exceptions. And if we take Jesus seriously, if we really intend to believe him and obey him, then we have an obligation to tell everyone no matter who they are, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. That obligation includes the Jewish people.

With regard to our Jewish friends and neighbors, let me say that I have unbounded admiration and affection for them. I think history will show for any student of history that the Jewish people have been persecuted and demeaned and even slaughtered by people who claim to be Christians. I have no sympathy for that kind of attitude or action. I have no patience with that kind of anti-semitism and I hope none of you will be guilty of anti-semitism. I don't believe Jesus has any sympathy either. We Christians should feel especially close to the Jews because we share a common spiritual heritage. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are our spiritual forefathers, too. We venerate and honor Moses just as they do. I suspect most of us here this morning have also been strong and vocal supporters of the nation of Israel as well. I also suspect most of us wish we had asked them to rescue our captives from Iran!

But it is precisely because I do honor and do respect, precisely because I do have a special affection for Jewish people, that I want to share with them the very best I have. And the best I have is Jesus. Wouldn't it be strange if I had something in my life that was the most important thing I had and then refused to share it with someone I claimed to care about? If I had something you needed and then didn't care enough about you as a human being to share it with you, wouldn't that be the worst form of disrespect and disregard? If I failed to share my very best with you, would I really be treating you as a person of worth, as someone who was significant, as someone who mattered? Well, you know very well my failure to share with you would say quite clearly, "you are not important. I don't respect your personhood. You don't matter to me. I don't care about you."

Of course, if Jesus was not really important to me, then it wouldn't matter whether I shared him or not. If I were a humanist, if I thought it doesn't matter what you believe, that religion isn't important, then I could sound very sophisticated and say, "well, I respect your beliefs, you respect what I believe, you are free to believe what you wish, everyone else is free to believe what he wishes." But if Jesus Christ is the Son of God, if he died on the cross for the sins of the world, and if there is no way to restore fellowship with God except through him, then he matters very much.

Of course, if we do respect others as persons of worth and if we really care about them, we will also respect their right to refuse our best and to say no to Jesus. And we won't hate them or persecute them or treat them badly if they reject Jesus. To do so should go against the teachings of the one we are trying to share. But will our Jewish friends and neighbors go to hell or be lost eternally if they do reject Jesus? The answer is no--you don't go to hell because you reject Jesus. You go to hell because you are a sinner who has rebelled against God, violated his commandments and broken his laws and gone your own stubborn, self-willed, self-centered way. That's why you go to hell. So the Jews are not going to hell because they reject Jesus, they're going to hell because of the same reasons you and I will go there, because we are sinners who rebel against God.

Now, what happens to the Jews or anybody else is not our decision. Praise God for that! The Bible says, "judge not that you be not judged." It is God who makes judgments. Whether a Jew is lost or not is God's decision and I trust a loving and merciful God to make fair decisions with everybody. But I want to tell you something, I don't want fairness, I don't want justice, I want mercy and I want forgiveness. I don't have to decide and you don't have to decide whether anybody is going to hell. The fact is all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. What we do have to decide is whether or not we are going to be obedient to Jesus and do what he says. And what he says is that we are to share the Good News that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him might not perish. And then he goes right on to the next verse to say, "he who believes not is already condemned. Now, I don't know how God will judge the Jew who rejects Jesus. That's God's business. But I want to tell you something, I have a pretty good idea of how he is going to judge you and me if we don't get on with the business of doing what he tells us to do.

Now, as a matter of fact, Jews for Jesus isn't anything new. There have been Jewish Christians trying to share Jesus with Jews since the birth of the Christian church. St. Paul once wrote that God had given him a mission to the Gentile world and he had given Peter a mission to the Jewish world. But even Paul on his missionary journey, wherever he went into a Gentile town, the first place he always went was the Jewish synagogue to share with his brothers the Good News that God had come.

In the early chapters of the Book of Acts, the Bible tells us that the first Christian sermon ever preached was to Jews. The first Christian martyr was stoned to death because he preached Jesus to Jews. So opposition to sharing Jesus--whether it is to Jews or Gentiles--is nothing new. As a matter of fact, in Jerusalem the Jewish leaders put Peter in prison because he insisted on sharing Jesus with the Jewish people. They threatened his life if he didn't stop. But Peter replied, "Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Then, when the Jewish leaders ordered them in these words, "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus", the disciples replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God for we cannot help but speak about what we have seen and heard."

So, what should the attitude of a Christian be towards Jewish people? Well, it should be an attitude of love, an attitude of concerned compassion, an attitude that he has towards anybody else whoever they are who doesn't know Jesus as his personal Saviour. He should do what Jesus said to do and share the Good News. So, in answer to the question, "Do Christians have a witness to make to the Jews?" The answer is decidedly, "yes."

But that isn't the real question this morning. We don't have to answer the question about whether we should evangelize Jews, the Bible has already answered that question. If you believe the Bible and if you believe Jesus what alternative is there? The real question at issue here is this--what is your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Never mind about the Jews--what about you? All have sinned--all have fallen short--all are lost. Jesus says, "I am the way." Have you made a commitment to him, have you invited him into your heart and asked him to take control of your will and to live out his life through you? You see, if you haven't done that you aren't any better off than the Jews. Maybe you are worse off because you know about Jesus and haven't let him into your heart.

Will the Jews go to hell if they don't accept Jesus? No, they're going to hell for the same reason everybody else is--because of their hard hearted, stiff necked, rebellion against God. Let me ask you this question, "Will you go to hell if you don't accept Jesus?" I suspect you know the answer to that question in your heart and I know the answer for me in my heart. Jesus says, "I am the way... no man comes to the Father but by me." Jesus is God's one way street to heaven. The question that faces you is this, are you traveling that street this morning? I can't answer that but you can.

Let me ask you, do you really care about the Jewish people? Then the best way for you and me to care is to have something worthwhile to share with them. And the only thing really worthwhile is Jesus Christ. And the only way for that worthwhileness to be evidenced is for Jesus to be reflected in us. Do you have something to share--has it so transformed your life that others see in you something so winsome, so attractive, so desirable that they yearn to have it themselves? You see when you reflect Jesus that way, you'll share it. People will believe you!

Every person here this morning--including myself--needs to recommit himself or herself to Jesus and to re-surrender his or her life to His Lordship and say, "Lord, break my heart for the lost, cut my heart to the quick for those who do not know Jesus as Lord; make me a reflection of Jesus Christ so others can see in me him who I love." When God has broken your heart for the lost and when he has entered into your life with such power that others see him through you, then you can go to your Jewish friends or any others and give them the greatest gift the world has ever known--the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, who is God's one way street.