

**John 8:48-59**  
**The Holy Trinity (C)**  
**30 May 2010**

*“Jesus IS”*

I. One of the most-watched T.V. series over the last six years has been *Lost*. Neither Julie nor I got into it. The couple of times I tried to watch, I got totally confused as to what was going on. Was it supposed to be a drama or science-fiction or both? It started off as a story about the survivors of a jet that crashed on an unknown island in the Pacific Ocean, who quickly became mixed up with some strange goings on.

The other night I came home to find Julie watching the final episode, which had been hyped up by the media. She said she wanted to see out how it ended. And so I sat down to see for myself.

In the last scenes, one of the main characters, Dr. Jack Shepherd, played by Matthew Fox, enters a church-like building where he is told he will meet with other members of the survivors. As he comes into the building he enters a chapel-like room containing a closed casket. There is a small altar with a bronze cross, not unlike the one that sits on our altar; but very quickly you notice there are other objects, such as a statue of Buddha and one of the chief Hindu god, Shiva.

On the other wall is a bright stained glass window. There again you can see a cross. But you also find the Ying-yang symbol of Taoism, the 8-spoke wheel of Buddhism, the “Aum” symbol of Hindu meditation, the crescent moon and star of Islam, and Judaism’s Star of David. Connecting them are beams of light from a single sun.

Jack’s dead father then appears to him and invites him to open the casket. When he finds it empty he realizes that he is dead along with all the other survivors. As he is reunited with them in the main church, Jack’s father tells him “this is the place you made together so that you could be together”. After embracing one another Jack’s father opens the door to the church and leads them into a brilliant white light, which one assumes is eternity.

Sniff, sniff; isn’t that sweet? All ends “happily forever after”. All religions lead to the same place.

That’s the message we hear *ad nauseum* from Hollywood, in our

classrooms and, sadly, from many religious leaders, even so-called Christians. Jesus is just one pane of glass in the larger stained glass window of spirituality. The Triune God is simply another name for Allah and Brahman and the Great Spirit of native religions.

II. But is that the truth? I suspect you might sometimes get asked the same question that often gets directed to me: What makes you think the Christian faith is the only true one? After all, all faiths teach us to love God as we know Him, and to treat each other with respect and love. What does it matter whether we follow Buddha or Mohammed or some other religious leader?

In the section from his Pentecost sermon, St. Peter identifies what is different about Jesus (Acts 2:22-36). Jesus rose from the dead. Before it happened, on a number of occasions, Jesus foretold of His suffering, crucifixion and death and that on the third day He would be raised to life. One thousand years before it happened, King David prophesied that the Holy One, Messiah, would die and yet not see corruption and decay in the grave. And that's exactly what happened on that first Easter morning: our Lord rose, was seen alive by hundreds of eyewitnesses and now sits at the right hand of God the Father, the firstfruits of the resurrection.

That is true of no other religious leader. As Peter says, King David died and his tomb was well known to all. The Buddha died. Muhammed died. Joseph Smith is dead. The so-called gods of Hinduism never lived during recorded history.

On the other hand the mission and ministry of Jesus are rooted in history. St. Luke's Gospel begins: *"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you . . . that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught"* (Luke 1:1-4).

St. John's first letter starts off this way: *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen*

*and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3).*

And, of course, there are the powerful words that begin John’s Gospel: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-5, 14).*

The stark difference and uniqueness of our Christian faith is that our Crucified yet Risen Saviour is God in the flesh. Yes, Jesus was a great teacher and prophet. Yes, He was exceptionally good and kind. Yes, even His opponents acknowledged that He and His apostles did stupendous miracles (John 11:45-48, Acts 4:5-22). But if He was only a teacher, prophet or miracle worker, and not God in the flesh—God come to take our sins to the cross in His own body—then our faith would be in vain, useless. As Martin Luther is quoted in our Lutheran Confessions: *“For if I believe that only the human nature suffered for me, then Christ would be a poor Saviour for me, in fact, He Himself would need a Saviour!” (Book of Concord, Formula of Concord, Article VIII, 40).*

In the Gospel for today, our Lord made His nature as both God and Man so clear that the Jews wanted to stone Him to death. Remember what He said to them when they were claiming He had a demon, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (v. 56-58).* “I am” is the name God had revealed to Moses at the burning bush on Mt. Sinai—Yahweh, the God who truly is. He said it even more pointedly in John 10: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (10:27-30).* At that John records that *“the Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them,*

*'I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone Me?' The Jews answered Him, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone You but for blasphemy, because You, being a man, make Yourself God'" (10:31-33).*

III. It is because He is true God and true Man, the God-Man who fulfilled all of God's promises, that we can be so confident in His promises to us, and be so bold in holding out the word of life to others. It's not that we take pleasure in throwing eternal condemnation and hell in the face of others who don't accept Jesus as only Messiah and Lord. But because "*no one comes to the Father except through*" Him (John 14:6), we know that it is the most loving thing we have to share with people. Because our Father in heaven wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

That's why He has placed us here on the corner of Queen and Church Streets for all these decades. To share this eternally life-saving message with those who will be lost forever without it. To counter all the relativistic, postmodern, politically-correct blather we hear and read and see everywhere else. To faithfully confess the saving name of our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, revealed in Jesus crucified, risen, ascended and reigning.

How appropriate, then, that in a few minutes we will re-dedicate the stained glass window that is the oldest in our present building. Since 1915 it has stood hidden behind the altar. The main focal points of the window are cross and the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of world carrying the banner of His resurrection victory for us and our salvation.

Today we will light that window again so that whenever we exit this sanctuary we will be reminded of the love our God has for us in sending our Good Shepherd, Jesus, to lay down His life for us and then take it up again on the third day. It is this Good Shepherd-Lamb, this God-Man who promises us that "If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste death." (v. 52).

That is the message we have to proclaim before He comes to judge the living and the dead. May God grant us His grace to continue to do so until He comes.

*Preached at Historic St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Kitchener, Ontario*