

Unifying Differences

(preached on May 5, 2024)

I'd like to start off this sermon with a joke...

Its a shame the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Religions can't get along.

We should really follow in the footsteps of the Hindi.

They've never had any beef.

Some of my fondest memories of high school, so far, are the talks I had with my best friend, Maddie. Specifically, our religious talks. Which is all fine and dandy until you realize one tiny detail... I'm a protestant, and she's a Catholic.

Now, it's certainly not unheard of for a Catholic person and Protestant person to be friends. But anyone who knows even a bit of Christian History will know that our two belief systems have had a... rocky relationship. And, like many before us, we didn't talk about all we had in common with each other when it came to faith... We talked about our differences.

But it isn't that fact that stands out to me now. It's *how* we talked about our religions. We are both very serious about our religious beliefs. And yet, when we were talking about their differences?

We told jokes.

We made playful jabs at the differences that had, in the past, led to long and deadly conflicts.

She, for example, would pick up the Bible I brought to school everyday, turn to me, and say: "It feels a little light... You didn't take any books out, did you?" Or, I'd point out on other occasions how much of a hassle it would be if I had to say... pray through someone else to speak to God... Just how strange would that be?

But I digress.

The topic of religion is, for good reason, generally talked about in a serious tone. The reason being that poking fun at another person's belief system is, if you're not close to them, a personal attack on that person. But that leads to the questions: Why do we always seem to focus on the differences anyways? Almost every religion in the world today stands for, at its core, peace and harmony among people. A paradise at the end of time and promise of a better future.

And yet we fight constantly.

We know, as Jesus's people, that we are supposed to welcome all, spread the good news, and treat our neighbor with love and respect. No where in the New Testament does Jesus tell us to persecute those who don't believe the same as we do. No where in the New Testament does he demand us to start wars over which God is real.

But that's what we've done.

So many times, the human race has almost brought itself to extinction because of our differences.

And we continue to do it today. Part of one of the most terrible wars that is going on today has religion as one of its focal points. Even though both of these religions sprang from the same Abrahamic Roots.

So many people have died. Adults, the elderly, *children* with their whole lives ahead of them. Not just in this war, but in so many others fought over differences in religion.

All because we couldn't sit back, talk about our differences, and understand our similarities. I won't expect everyone to do what Maddie and I did. To share a joke and laugh about the small little rifts between our beliefs. But we can open our hearts to understand that, in the end, we're not so different.

I know. And I'm sure most of you know. That we can do little to stop these intercultural clashes. But we can start small.

We can follow the teachings of our religion and welcome others who may share different beliefs. We can focus more on the similarities, rather than the differences, big in small, which have long divided us.

With God's help, we can start to understand others, and the differences between us all.

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