Lord Jesus, Good shepherd of the sheep, help us to hear and recognise your voice and to obey it – for your glory’s sake, Amen.

Jesus seems to make the most megalomaniac claims – unless they are true.

He points to himself and uses the divine name – “I AM” “I am the good shepherd”. Everyone else is hired hands who run away at the sight of the wolf. “I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father” “I lay down my life for the sheep. No-one takes it from me. I have power to lay it down; and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father”

Did anyone really believe these things? Well yes – it seems the early Christians did and so in our reading from Acts 4v11, we hear

Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.” ^15 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’

So says the Galilean fisherman Peter boldly to the intelligentsia and rulers of his day. What are we to make of such exclusivity in today’s sophisticated and multi cultural society? Surely we now know that there are many roads that lead to God?

The idea that all religions are basically one is a lovely and sentimental idea that appeals to our day of tolerance but there are some serious flaws in that view.

1. It is illogical.

It is illogical because the different religions are so very different. The god of Hinduism is plural and impersonal. The god of Islam is singular and personal.

The divine is Buddhism is not personal and not creative. There is no forgiveness and no supernatural aid. The God of Christianity is Creator, personal and offers forgiveness and help.

These are obviously self contradictory. They cannot all be right or true.

To take the specific example of Jesus, if it is right that he is the Son of God, then Muslims and Jews are failing badly to love God and obey God as he really is. If Jesus is not the Son of God, then likewise Christians are failing to love and obey God as he really is.

It is just foolish to say that all roads lead in the same ultimate direction. “All roads lead to Rome” was a phrase not to be taken literally but to apply to the truth that there was a time when the Roman Empire ruled the world.

To say “All roads from Coventry lead to London” is palpably untrue and unhelpful if you’re trying to get there.

2. It’s impossible.

If there is a god, then he is the source of humanity. He cannot be “found”. He needs to reveal himself.

He does so to a certain extent through Creation and conscience but the curtains are drawn back (the meaning of revelation) through Scripture and Jesus.
Hebrews 1 v1 puts it like this

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.”

If Peter is right about Jesus, two questions arise.

1. “If there is no other name by which we must be saved, does that mean that all other religions are wrong.

The answer to that is “No”

Every good thought, every gleam of light, every word of truth to be found in any religion and in non religious philosophies like Marxism is part of God’s self disclosure.

All truth is God’s truth – even if it has its focus in the one who became incarnate.

Actually, it is the atheist who is put in the uncomfortable position of having to deny all truth in religion. No wonder, only about 4% of the world’s population signs up to such a view.

CS Lewis put it like this “If you are a Christian, you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong all through. If you are an atheist, you do have to believe that the main point of all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all those religions, even the queerest ones, contain some hint of truth. When I was an atheist, I had to try and convince myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian, I was able to take a more liberal view.”

Lewis goes on to draw an analogy with arithmetics where there is only one right answer to a problem and all other answers are wrong – BUT some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others.

2. If there is no other name by which we must be saved” – does that mean that all non Christians are inevitably lost?

The answer again is definitely “No”

The whole Bible in general and the apostle Paul in particular in his letter to the Romans makes it plain that men and women will be judged with utter fairness according to such light as they had.

I am quite sure that there will be many in heaven with God who lived before Christ and many who have not met with him – including Muslims and Hindus and Buddhists - But it is not automatic and it will be because of Christ and what he has done. Not all will be saved but all those saved will be because of what Jesus has done.

But of course that doesn’t let us off the hook for we have heard of Jesus and his gospel. We are those who are in a position to say “yes” or “No” to him, to bow the knee or to reject him.

One of the paradoxes of history is the relationship between the beliefs and practices of the early Christians as compared to those of the culture around them.

The Graeco-Roman world’s religious views were open and tolerant – everyone had his or her own god. The practice of the culture however was quite brutal with a huge gulf between rich and poor, male and female.

By contrast, Christians insisted there was only one name by which people could be saved and yet they were remarkably welcoming to those that the culture marginalised. The early Christians mixed people from different races and classes in a way that scandalised those around them.

Why would such an exclusive belief system lead to behaviour that was so open to others? It was because Christians had within their belief system the strongest possible resource for practicing sacrificial service, generosity and peace-making.
At the very heart of their view of reality was a man who died for his enemies whilst praying for their forgiveness.

Reflection on this could only lead to a radically different way of dealing with those who were different from them.

Today is Vocation Sunday – a day the church encourages people particularly to consider ordination. Quite a few have gone out from the Cathedral over the years and I’m so glad that Jimmy Lawrence, our student minister, is the latest to be accepted for training by the Church of England.

Let’s keep praying for more and consider the opportunities ourselves.

Vocation is a life calling for all of us who follow Christ be it ordination or something else.

May we all, like Peter and all the first Christians, proclaim the uniqueness of Christ whilst welcoming and serving all.