

Islam - Christianity and the Religions of the World

Genesis 21:9-20

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I. The Story of Muhammad

- A. Muhammad – 570 – 632 A.D.
- B. The religious world of Mecca
- C. The religious experiences and recitations
- D. The *Hijra* – the migration to Medina 622 A.D. – year 0 for Muslims
- E. The triumphant return to Mecca
- F. The Qur'an and the spread of Islam

II. Essential Muslim Beliefs

Islam = _____ Muslim = _____

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- B. "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet"
- C. The Five Pillars of Islam:
 - 1. Faith in Allah
 - 2. Prayer five times daily
 - 3. The offering to the poor
 - 4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan (commemorating Qur'an and Hijra)
 - 5. A pilgrimage to Mecca

III. Essential Differences Between Christianity and Islam

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Conclusion – Muslim Extremism and the Call of Christ

This week we will examine various Bible passages related to last Sunday's sermon on Islam – learning from our Muslim cousins, and understanding more clearly our faith as Christians.

Monday, January 28 – Review your notes from yesterday's sermon. The meaning of the word "Islam" is "surrender" or "submission." Devout Muslims seek to submit their entire lives to God. This is exactly what we as Christians seek to do. This should form the basis for a bridge between Christians and Muslims. How might this be the starting point in discussions between America and Islamic nations regarding terrorism? Take a moment to write down what you think it means to be completely surrendered or submitted to God. When we call Jesus Christ our "Lord" we are submitting to him – the word Lord meaning master or ruler. *Read Romans 12:1-2 and Matthew 16:24-26* and use these verses as an outline for prayer, inviting Christ to help you be completely surrendered to him.

Tuesday, January 29 – Muslims pray five times each day, if possible kneeling in submission to God as they do. The Christian's mealtime graces were meant to help foster prayer throughout the day. If you do not already do so, consider adopting the discipline of praying when you awaken, at your breakfast meal, at your noon meal, at suppertime, and before you go to bed. Each of these prayers is an opportunity to acknowledge your love and devotion to God. *Read and pray Matthew 6:5-14.* What are the principles Jesus is teaching us in this prayer – his intention was not that this prayer be repeated by rote, but that its content shape our prayers. *Read I Thessalonians 5:16-18.* What does Paul mean by praying without ceasing?

Wednesday, January 30 – Muslims are required to give approximately 2.5% of their income to the poor. Christians are commanded in the scripture to care for the poor, both inside and outside of the church. We are to especially care for those in the body of Christ. As a church we do this through our missions giving, both financially and through in-kind giving like our recent food and clothing drives. Have you considered setting aside funds, beyond your tithe, to be able to help people who are in need financially? Let's turn to a familiar passage which guides us in this, *Read Matthew 25:31-46.*

Thursday, January 31 – There are significant differences between Muslims and Christians, chief of which regards the Qur'an and its teaching about Jesus. Muslims believe Muhammad was given messages by God in trances which ultimately became the Qur'an. Christians do not believe the Qur'an represents the word of God – but Muhammad's interpretation of his spiritual experiences in the light of his own theological ideas and his need and desire to unite and lead the tribal people of Mecca and Medina. With regard to his teachings about Jesus we look, as our authority, to the witness of the apostles who walked with Jesus, who watched as he was crucified and touched him after his resurrection, to help us know Christ. Muhammad taught that Jesus was simply a prophet. Let's read a few of the hundreds of verses in the New Testament regarding Jesus, *Read Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 22:14-20, John 1:1-18, Colossians 1:15-20.*

Friday, February 1 – One of the places where we see a significant difference between the New Testament and the Qur'an is in the role of violence. Muhammad was a warrior and set rules for engaging in war. Some of his teaching has been taken as the basis for acts of terror by extremists. Today we turn to the very different approach of Jesus. *Read Matthew 5:38-45 and Romans 12:14-21.* What does this tell us about how we are to respond to anger and violence in our world? End your time today praying about how God might use you to be an ambassador to our Muslim cousins.

"Islam"

Theme: "Christianity and Religions of the World"

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – Based on a sermon series by Rev. Adam Hamilton
January 28, 2007 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

Genesis 21:9-20

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SLIDE 1 Christianity and World Religions – Islam.

Today we come to what may be the most important in our series of sermons on Christianity and religions of the world as we come to the religion of Islam. This may be the most important sermon in the series because our world is in the midst of a clash of cultures in ways that we don't often understand. Many of us as Christians fail to understand the nuances of Islam or their belief system. It will be very important if there is ever to be peace in our world that we as Christians come to understand more fully our Muslim cousins.

Let me give the same disclaimer this morning that I gave at last week. I have studied for each of these sermons around 20 to 30 hours and spent time with persons from these different religious traditions, most of it in the last week. I have explored Islam through several books, a number of websites, several PBS documentaries, and meeting with a number of experts in Islam. I even took a short course in Islam while in seminary and was able to worship at an Islamic mosque. My most profound experience with the Islamic faith came through a fellow in seminary student who was married to a Muslim who was beat up one day on the streets of Denver. He almost died from his wounds and the story was in the media for several weeks highlighting the tensions and the struggles that Islamic people who live in America often feel.

All of this together does not make me an expert on Islam. What I'm going to try to do today is to summarize very briefly the life of Mohammed, the founder of the religion of Islam. Second, we will look at several major tenants of Islam and the practices of Islamic people. Third, we will look at two points at

which Muslims and Christians will never be able to agree. Finally I want to offer you a challenge and an invitation at the end of this message.

SLIDE 2 The Story of Muhammad.

Let's begin with the story of Muhammad. Just as Christianity has as its center Jesus Christ, and just as Buddhism has the Buddha at its center, Islam has as its center and foundation the prophet Muhammad. Muhammad was born in 570A.D and lived to be 62 years old. Let's remember the timeline that we have been using that you see on the screen.

SLIDE 3 Time-line of the Hebrews

Abraham	Moses	David	Exile	Jesus	NT	
2000 B.C.	1200 B.C.	1000 B.C.	586 B.C.	5 B.C.	49-100 A.D.	570-632 A.D.
		Hind Vedas	Buddha			Muhammad

Mohammed was born and grew up in the city of Mecca, in what is modern-day Saudi Arabia in the Arabian Peninsula. He was born into a family in which there was great tragedy. His father died just before he was born in his mother died when he was six. He went to live with his grandfather who passed away shortly after he arrived. He was raised by his uncle in a home that was poor so he did not learn how to read or write.

As he grew up, he learned to work with the tradesmen who came in to Mecca. Mecca was the center of commerce and trade in the region and the great caravans that crossed the Arabian deserts would end there. They would come there because Mecca was not only the center of commerce but of religion. In this city of Mecca there was a shrine that had been there so long that no one could remember where it had come from. The Muslims believe that Adam himself worshiped on that site and that later Abraham and Ishmael built a shrine there called the Kaaba. Our word for cube comes from the Arabic word Kaaba which means cube or box. Here is a picture of the modern-day Kaaba in Mecca.

SLIDE 4 Kaaba.

In the time of Mohammed the Kabba was a place for worship for the 360 plus different deities that were worshiped by the Arabian people. Every tribe had their own deity and they would come to this place to worship. As the people came to this place to worship and offer their sacrifices it was not always a holy or pure act. Mecca was much like the city of Corinth in Paul's day 500 to 600 years before. Corinth was a city of great commerce with the

Temple to Aphrodite where there was a great deal of immorality, and so it was in Mecca at the time.

As Mohammed grew up he became a man of deep spiritual longings. He was someone who was considered very trustworthy by others. The tradesmen who came to see him understood that Mohammed was a man of his word. He was held in high esteem by many people.

At the age of 25 he married a woman who was 15 years his elder name Khadijah. She was a widow woman and he had been entrusted with their business. They built a relationship and fell in love and married. They had six children, two boys and four girls. Once more tragedy struck Mohammed's home when the two boys died in their infancy.

While Mohammed had a deep spiritual longing, when he looked around at the religions of his day he found no comfort or solace in all of the tribal gods. He began to think that there must be something more. There were two groups of people in Mecca in his day who did not worship all the deities and they lived a life that was pure, a life that was holy, a life that was different than the others. These were the Jews and the Christians. They were a very small population at the time but he was drawn to them. He was drawn to their scriptures and to their stories into the kind of faith that they asked. He came to believe in their God. Their God was called Allah which simply means "the God" and that there is no other God, only Allah.

Mohammed would go up to a cave that was in the mountainside which overlooked Mecca. He would spend time there in prayer. By the time he was 40 he had a most profound experience in the midst of his time in prayer. He actually had fallen asleep during a time of prayer and in the midst of that sleep he had a dream that was powerful and transforming. A spiritual being he came to know later as the angel Gabriel came and spoke to him as he lay in that dream.

Gabriel woke him and said to him, "Mohammed read this." He held out a parchment with some writing on it and told him to read it. Mohammed said, "I can't read. I don't know how to read." Several times Gabriel told him to read it and several times Mohammed claimed he did not know how to read. Finally, the angel pressed the parchment into his chest so that he thought he would die. When he was awakened the words that were on the parchment were imprinted on his heart.

He went back down into the village to find his wife. He was terrified

and told her he did not know if he had seen a demon or an angel or if he was losing his mind. Over the next 23 years he would have visions like this over and over again. He came to believe that the angel Gabriel was telling him the very words of God. He would come out of those trances and he would speak to the people of Mecca. He would tell them that, "Allah says there is no other God. Stop worshiping these pagan idols. Turn to God to repent of your ways or else you will face the judgment."

The people of Mecca did not listen to him. He gathered a small following that included his family and eventually as many as 40 people came to believe in Muhammad as a prophet was receiving divine words from God. They would listen to him after he had come down from those times of vision and he would recite for them to things that the angel Gabriel had told him and they would write them down.

About the year 620 some people in Mecca conspired to kill Mohammed. At the same time there was a village 200 miles to the north that was in great turmoil and was looking for a leader. They had heard about Mohammed and offered him the opportunity to come to be one of their leaders. In the summer of 620 Mohammed and his band of followers and friends fled the city of Mecca and moved to what became known as the city of Medina. It was there that they set up the first Islamic state. They lead people in the worship of Allah alone and it was there that Islamic law prevailed. Muslims count all time from this moment in history.

SLIDE 5 In 622 A.D. the calendar begins for Muslims.

Today your Muslim friends do not live in the year 2007. Instead, it is the year 1428 A.H. or After the Hajira which was the migration from Mecca to Medina. It is 1428 because they have a lunar year which is shorter than our year and so the years go by quicker.

From the time Muhammad comes to Medina he is not only a religious ruler but a political ruler. He gathers a small army and becomes the judge of that city and region as well. Once he moves to Medina his visions are very different. Before he had prophetic visions about beliefs and theological ideas, but now he has visions from Gabriel in which God tells him how to order society and what is right and wrong. He is told what the legal statutes should be and how to lead an army and how to wage war. All of these things come from that time that he becomes a ruler in Medina.

He leads his band of soldiers on sorties as they go out and fight and

conquer small villages surrounding Medina as they try and consolidate power. They are at war with the trading caravans from Mecca at times. There is a battle in which Mohammed decisively defeats the troops from Mecca and he is allowed to return to Mecca as its ruler and leader. He consolidates power between Medina and Mecca and ultimately controls the entire Arabian Peninsula.

The first thing he does when he rides back into Mecca is go straight to the Kaaba and destroy all of the idols that are there and consecrates that building to the worship of Allah. Three years later he dies at the age of 62.

His followers collect all of those things that had been written down the previous 23 years into what is known as the Qur'an. From that time forward they spread the Islamic faith throughout the world. That is a short and not very adequate summary of the story of Mohammed and the beginnings of Islam, but it will have to do for today.

As we transition from the history of Islam to some of their basic beliefs, this is a good time to mention one thing that many of you have asked these past few weeks as we have been in this series of sermon and looking forward to this sermon on Islam.

SLIDE What is the difference between Sunni and Shiite?

First, let me say this is no easy question to answer in just a few minutes, but let me give you a thumbnail sketch. The separation of these two sects in Islam happened shortly after Muhammad's death. Remember that Muhammad is not only a religious leader at the time of his death, but also a political ruler as well we sets up the social order based on his revelations from God. After he dies, the question for the Islamic world becomes, "Who will be our divinely appointed leader now?"

Two major thoughts began to develop. One was that the new leader must come from the lineage of Muhammad and be divinely appointed. These were the Shiite's. Shiite's also believe the prophet will come again and bring justice and so there is more of an apocalyptic focus on the end time. The other group said that the next leader could be selected, and they were Sunni's. For a good article that clarifies these see this History News Network web page: <http://hnn.us/articles/934.html>

In today's world, 80-85 percent of Muslims are Sunni while 15 percent are Shiite. Two Muslim countries are predominantly Shiite however, and that is Iran and Iraq. Can you begin to understand how it might be difficult

to develop a democracy or impose any kind of leadership structure in a country where a majority of people believe the leaders should be divinely appointed or from the lineage of Muhammad himself?

While the tendency is to say that Sunni's are more open and liberal and Shiite's are more extreme, this is not necessarily helpful. Saddam Hussein was a Sunni ruling in predominantly Shiite Iraq. Osama Bin Laden and Hezbollah are both Sunni. As a matter of fact, if you were to ask a Muslim if they are Sunni or Shiite you would find that 90 percent would simply say, "I am a Muslim." While the media may make much of the differences, many in the Muslim world are not as fixated on the differences.

Now let's talk about the basic beliefs of Islam that all Muslims would adhere to.

SLIDE 6 Essential Muslim Beliefs.

The first thing many of you have asked about is what the word "Islam" means and how is that different from the "Muslim." Islam has as its root word "slm" or salaam of which we recognize a Hebrew variant of that, "shalom". Salaam and shalom are cousins and the words mean peace, but they also means submission or surrender.

SLIDE 7 Islam = "surrender" or "submission"

Muslim = "ones who are submitted to Allah"

You will recognize the "slm" in both Islam and Muslim. Islam means "the peace that comes from surrender or submission to God." A Muslim is someone who practices the religion of Islam, like a Christian practices the religion of Christianity.

The idea of surrendering your life to God is profound. We believe in this idea is well as Christians—that we should be wholly and completely surrendered to God. Some of you have asked if Allah is the same as God. What you need to know is that Allah is the word that people use for God in Arabic, just like "Dios" is the word that people use for God in Spanish. Allah is simply a word for God. Clearly Mohammed was looking at the same God as the God of Abraham, the same God that we serve. Christians today in Saudi Arabia where they speak Arabic call God Allah, as do the Jews who speak this language. This is the same God that we worship.

The second basic belief I want us to focus on today has to do with the book—this book.

SLIDE 8 The Qur'an.

Muslims believe that that this book is the very words of God. The belief is that Mohammed was authentically receiving words from God. The Qur'an is about 4/5 the size of your New Testament. This particular Qur'an that I have been reading looks much bigger than that because it contains both the words in Arabic and English as well as a commentary.

This book is very different from the Bible that you read. Christians look at the old and New Testament and as we read it we understand that human beings wrote those words inspired by God. There is no question that Paul wrote to his apostles and God did not write them. Got inspired Paul but Paul wrote them. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote their Gospels under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. David wrote his psalms because of the inspiration God had put upon his heart.

Most of the Bible is written in the form of people speaking about God. There are stories that describe God's interaction with human beings. There are stories about Jesus. There are psalms about God. There are letters about Jesus. There are parables and stories that Jesus told. A majority of what we read in our Bible speaks of God in the third person.

This is not so when it comes to the Qur'an. Muslims believe that God through Gabriel was dictating in Arabic to Mohammed his very words. The Qur'an is not written in the third person. It does not contain the stories that our Bible contains. The Qur'an is written in this way, "We say to you, tell the human beings to do this" "We say to you humanity, do this" "Don't you understand human beings that our will for you is to do this." The sayings are all written in the first person as if God is speaking directly to Mohammed and through him to you and me. It is a very different kind of Scripture.

For Muslims the Qur'an is only the Qur'an if it is in Arabic—the very words that God used. The Qur'an is held in the highest of esteem. You never set the Qur'an on the floor and you never set it on a coffee table just to gather dust. These are the words of God.

There is much in the Qur'an that you will recognize. There are stories of Noah and Adam and Abraham and Moses and Jonah. There are stories about Jesus and John the Baptist. There is a whole chapter just about Mary in the Qur'an. But you will find when you read these stories they do not always match up with the stories that we know are old and New Testament. A Muslim will say that where the Qur'an does not agree with

the old and New Testament the Qur'an is correct. The Qur'an is a revision that corrects the corruption you find in the Hebrew Bible or in the New Testament made by the early church. This is God's final definitive word.

The Qur'an is for Muslims what Jesus is for Christians. Jesus is God's definitive word for Christians. You remember that we say that Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is how God chose to communicate to us his final word. Every other word of Scripture and every word claimed to be from God is measured in the light of Jesus. This is not so for Muslims. The Qur'an is the final and definitive word. It is the final answer.

These two beliefs that we have talked about are part of the five basic pillars of Islam. These are both beliefs and practices of every Muslim person. This is what is required of you. I would like you to hear a Muslim talk about these five pillars. Let us hear from Ahmed El-Sherif, a Muslim who leads the Mosque in Kansas City.

VIDEO Islam 1

SLIDE 8 The Five Pillars of Islam:

- 1. Faith in Allah**
- 2. Prayer five times daily**
- 3. The offering to the poor**
- 4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan (commemorating Qur'an and Hijra)**
- 5. A pilgrimage to Mecca.**

So those are the five pillars of Islam. The first and the foundational is the idea of an unwavering faith in Allah. There is just one simple faith statement if you are a Muslim. There are no large creeds or fancy doctrines. If one is a Muslim, one would say, ***"I bear witness to this truth. There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet. I am his servant, and his slave, his apostle."*** If you say that phrase and you mediate in your heart you have just become a Muslim. That is the phrase by which one becomes a Muslim. The belief is that there is only one God and that Mohammed is the final prophet offering the definitive word of God.

The next pillar is the five times of prayer a day in which one kneels and bows one's head all the way to touch the ground, prostrating oneself before God. The third pillar is the offering to the poor which is supposed to

be about 2.5% of one's income each year.

Then there is the fast of Ramadan as the fourth pillar. The fast of Ramadan is one month and this year it is September 13 to October 11. It commemorates the first vision that was given to Mohammed during that same month. It also commemorates the flight from Mecca to Medina that took place in that month. Muslims remember these two holy things during that month and a fast all day long from sun up to sunset. They eat only before the sun has gone up and after the sun has gone down.

Finally, there is the Hajj—the pilgrimage to Mecca. While Christians often take pilgrimages to the holy land and Jerusalem, Muslims would take their pilgrimage to Mecca to the Kabba. It can happen at any time in one's life if you have the resources to go, but there is a particular time where more folks come than others. This year it will be December 18 to December 21.

These are the five pillars of Islam I wish we had more time to talk about the faith and practices of Muslims because there is so much more to it than just this. Given what we have learned so far together, I want to take a few minutes and talk about the one thing upon which Muslims and Christians will never be able to agree. We need to be honest about this. There's a lot that we can agree upon and there are ways we can learn from our Muslim friends. There is much they can teach us and there is much that we should learn from them, but there is one point at which we can never meet.

SLIDE 9 Essential Differences Between Christianity and Islam

The Qur'an

This difference has to do with the Qur'an—understanding what it is, how it came to be, and what it teaches. Ever he shared with you that Muslims believe the Qur'an is a direct word from God. It is the final edition and it corrects everything that came before. These are the direct word of God.

But for us as Christians to this cannot be our direct word from God. We can read it as I have been doing this week and we will find in here things are beautiful. There are passages where you and I would agree like any other beautiful piece of literature about God. But there are other pieces that you will read and say, "Now wait a minute. That's not how it happened.

That's not the way that story took place. That is not how people who were eyewitnesses described what took place."

There are other places in the Qur'an where I read it and felt like it was a step backward out of the New Testament and its challenging word. It seems like we are going backwards from the lofty perch of the New Testament into Old Testament legalities that some of us would like to leave behind. This is especially true when it comes to violence and war. Of course we must realize as we read the Qur'an that Mohammed was a warrior. That was the time in which he lived and that was the role he played as General of the Army. So he speaks about when someone attacks you, how you don't spare the sword but you kill them all if necessary.

When I read that and compare it to the Gospels where Jesus says, "If someone strikes you on the cheek you turn the other cheek," it looks like a step backwards. Or compare that to what the apostle Paul said, "If someone is wounding you are hurting you, then you give them blessings in return and in this way you might be able to change their heart and transform an enemy into a friend." It seems like the Qur'an is a step backwards from that.

We cannot get too high and mighty about the fact that the Qur'an advocates in certain places violence in response to certain activities. We remember that our own Bible does the same in the Old Testament. There is Elijah the prophet who goes to the top of Mt. Carmel and slays all the prophets of Bael with his sword. But in the New Testament we have a different picture.

More importantly, as Christians the idea of the Qur'an being the direct word of God challenges us to think about how God does speak to human beings. We have the claim from a group of people that God spoke a direct word to one particular prophet who was a man and this is the definitive word of God.

Christians believe otherwise. We believe that human beings always hear God's word through a filter. You know how this works.

I stand up here and preach on Sundays and after the service I will be standing back in the atrium and people will come up to me and say, "You know I really loved that one point you made in your sermon." I listened to what they say and I think to myself, "I didn't make that point. I didn't even want to make that point. I don't even believe that!" But somehow that is

what they heard. I am sure you all have experienced this in your own life where you communicated what you thought was one thing and the person heard something else. This is how we are and its part of the human condition. We don't always hear things clearly and we don't always say things clearly.

Christians believe that up to the time of Christ God spoke through people, through the founding fathers and mothers of our faith, the rulers and prophets of Israel. We understand that those prophets lived in a certain time and place and we hear their words through those filters.

But when God wanted to give us his definitive word, he did not put that on the heart of a prophet or a King, but instead his Word became flesh and lived among us. In this way God could speak to us in our own language—the language of humanity. God could be born as a child, into a home of poverty. He could grow up teaching us the way, the truth, and the life by his example, by his activity, and by the way he loved people and by his healing acts. Through all this, God was showing us something about himself because this was God's Word made flesh.

When he died on the cross he was teaching us about our own brokenness and our need for redemption and reconciliation, about the love of God and the price that God was willing to pay so that we might be in a right relationship with him. When he rose from the grave God was teaching us something about death and about life and about hope and about joy. Jesus did all of this because he was the Word made flesh. God did not commit his word to another prophet, but he became flesh and lived among us. This is what Christians believe.

So as Christians how do we look at Mohammed and make sense of what happened? I want us to wrestle with this for a minute because somehow or another you have to deal with the claims of Muhammad. As some TV evangelists slander the prophet Mohammed by saying he was a lunatic, I have to wonder: Is this how you are going to treat the founder of the Muslim faith? For me this is no way to treat someone else's prophet. That does not help them hear your love of Christ. That does not help others to hear the gospel when you say things like that.

When I look at Mohammed I believe that he was earnestly seeking after God. I believe that he was trying to understand God and longing to experience God in his life. I have no doubt that he had spiritual experiences like we do. But here's something that I have come to learn

about God speaking to us and how God does this. In my 20 years of being a pastor and ministry leader at least a dozen times members of my churches have come to me and said something like this, "God told me to tell you this Jeff." When somebody tells me that, I am going to listen because I want to hear what God told someone else to tell me. If God said something that I need to hear then I want to know what it is.

But I also have to tell you that while I'm listening to them, my little antenna go up. I ask questions such as: How exactly do you know that this was God who told you this? How do you know that there is no part of yourself and your will and your ideas that got caught up in this? I am listening for God to speak but at the same time I am recognizing how God speaks. As human beings we are all fallible and we don't always hear things just exactly as they should be. Quite frankly, if you knew some of the things that people told me that God told them to tell me then you would understand my skepticism.

Some of you have heard me say this, but every Friday as I'm finishing up the sermon I am going to preach for that weekend I come in the sanctuary and I pray over where you are now sitting. I pray something like this, "God you know all the people who will be sitting here this weekend. You know their needs. You know their hurts and you know their hearts. Please help me to hear your words and to know what to say to them. Help me to know what you want me to speak to these people." I pray that each week while I'm preparing each sermon and while I'm doing research and while I'm reading. I pray almost every night before I go to bed, ***"God help me not to say something stupid on Sunday morning that push people away from you!"*** That's kind of about me but it's also about you.

All that said, I will not stand here in the pulpit and tell you that God told me to tell you this. I can tell you that this is my best understanding of what God's will is for my life and for our lives. I try to seek God and I feel God lead me in certain directions as I prepare a sermon, but I am not a clear enough conduit to tell you that I know exactly what God wants to say. I'm just in the best I can to figure it out in my own life and sometimes the Holy Spirit actually makes that work—but it is the Holy Spirit that does the work and not me.

Some of you have heard me tell about how in the summers in Boulder where I went to college our campus ministry did not have church and so I would go to the second Baptist Church which was down the street from my

apartment. In that church people would actually stand up in the middle of the service and begin to talk because they felt like God was speaking right through them. The person would stand up and everyone would turn their attention to them, even if it was during the sermon, and they would say something like this, "God is speaking to me right now in He want me to tell you this!" That's a pretty amazing thing to be sitting there and to think that God is speaking directly through that person at that moment.

But people in that little second Baptist Church knew that people didn't always get it right. They would always measure what that person said over what we know about God in the person of Jesus Christ. This is how we determine what is right and what is not right. Sometimes even the little old ladies who they revered in that church would be off just a little bit!

I remember hearing a story about an elderly woman standing up in the middle of a charismatic service and saying, "Thus sayeth the Lord, as it was in the days of Moses when I caused it to flood upon the earth for 40 days and 40 nights." And the young people off to the side whispered to each other, "I wonder if the good Lord forgot that was Noah and not Moses who was in the flood." Sometimes we miss what God is saying.

I want you to imagine what would happen if we took notes over the course of 23 years from that second Baptist Church. And every time someone got up and spoke as if the Lord was speaking through them we wrote those down. Then we compiled it and said, "Okay world, here is the newest testament. You've got the Old Testament and you got the New Testament and here is the newest testament. God said these things directly in our worship service. If these things disagree with your Old or New Testament, then you should go with what we have written down because this is the final revision. God told us these things directly."

How many of our churches would say, "We'll give up what are Bible says in favor of this newest testament"? How many of our Muslim friends would give up their Qur'an for this newest revelation in the second Baptist Church in Boulder. Neither a Muslim nor Christian would do that, because we as Christians recognize that the definitive word was Jesus.

This means that as Christians we might read the Qur'an and there are parts of it we would agree with and parts of it we would not agree with. This is particularly true when we come to the person of Jesus.

SLIDE 10 Differences: Jesus Christ.

In Islam Jesus is considered a prophet. After a Muslim says the name Jesus just as they say after a they mention Muhammad, they say, "peace be upon him." They revere Jesus. Mohammed said that Jesus was the second greatest prophet who ever lived after Mohammed himself. But according to Islam Jesus was not the divine son of God.

Mohammed and the Qur'an teach that Jesus was born of a virgin. I find this fascinating because the whole reason that God orchestrated a virgin birth was to teach us a theological lesson that in Jesus Christ humanity and divinity were coming together, that God became flesh. That was the whole point of the virgin birth. Why teach the virgin birth if you don't teach the message that was meant to go along with it?

Mohammed also said that Jesus did not die on the cross to take away the sins of the world. He taught that God forgives us when we do enough good deeds to outweigh the bad deeds. That's just how it works and we don't need a Savior. Once again this is interesting because Muhammad hailed Jesus as a prophet and yet his very name, **Jeshua means "God saves, for he shall save his people from their sins."**

In the Qur'an Jesus never said at the Last Supper, "This is my body broken for you and this is my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." As a matter of fact, one passage of the Qur'an says that Jesus was never even crucified. Someone who looked like him was crucified and Jesus himself was not, but was instead raised up directly to God as all the other prophets.

I find it fascinating that someone 600 years after the apostles who were eyewitnesses wrote the Gospels saying they were standing there and they saw them placed the crown of thorns on his head would contradict that and say it did not happen. They were Jesus' best friends and they saw him die and they took him down from the cross and they laid him in the tomb, and on the third day he rose again and once again they were present to see his resurrection. The eyewitnesses wrote this because they were standing there.

When I read the Qur'an and sections about Jesus, what I see is the gospel has been robbed of all of its power. Jesus is not the Word made flesh. Jesus is not God's definitive word. He does not die on the cross for the sins of the world, and he is not resurrected to give us hope and life. He is simply a prophet and a teacher. And at this point, as a Christian, I can

never agree with my Muslim brothers or sisters. We will always have to agree to disagree about this.

For us as Christians I look at the Qur'an and I see it like a countless number of other things that have been written by people of faith over the last 2000 years. Some things they got right, some things they got wrong, some things were shaded by their own ideas and their own theology and their own sociological circumstances. I'm going to listen for what I can learn from it, but I'm going to measure it against a standard of the Word that became flesh.

SLIDE 11 Islam

Most of us, when we think of Muslims unfortunately think of Muslim extremists. This week I was treated with such respect and love by the Muslims I spent time with. When I was in seminary and I worshiped at a mosque, they knew I would not agree with them on everything as a Christian, but they welcomed me and others from our seminary with open arms. They were gracious and caring and they taught me how to do what they were doing. When I remember how I was treated there I can only pray that our congregation would welcome Muslims in the same way.

There is so much for us to learn from our Muslim brothers and sisters and most Muslims are not represented by the extremists—perhaps .001%. But nevertheless that is our picture. Let us not forget as we Christians look back on our own history we have our own bad apples that we are not proud of. When Christians went to the Holy Land they wrote back to their families in Europe proud, **“that on this day the blood of the Muslims ran as high as the ankles of the forces to the streets of Jerusalem.”** You have heard me say not to judge God by his followers, and I believe that is true of our Muslim brothers and sisters as well.

Let me conclude by being clear that I do not agree with our Muslim friends on several key points. There are places however, that I think I can learn from them. They serve the God that we serve even though they understand him in different ways. Many Muslims have totally surrendered their lives to Allah. That's what we call you to do every week at First United Methodist Church here in Durango. Many of our Muslim cousins spend five times a day in prayer kneeling before God and I think of the prayer life of the people of our church and I think we could be ashamed in comparison with their prayer life. Their willingness to commit to a half percent of their income every year to people who are in need around them looks very much

like the gospel of Jesus Christ who says, "when I was hungry you gave me something to eat." We have a lot to learn from our Muslim friends.

And we have something to share with them. But how will we share with them? How we share with them the fullness of Jesus Christ and what he came to offer and what he can do in our lives? Will it be by arguing? Do you think you can effectively convince someone about your faith in Jesus Christ by arguing with them—probably not?

Do you think it will happen when you are fearful or when you look down your nose at someone who is from a Muslim family? Do you think it will happen when you judge them without knowing them or when you just stay away from them because they are different from you? It probably will not happen that way. It will not happen when our TV evangelists stand up as Christians and say insulting things about their prophet.

The only way that I can figure we might have the opportunity to share the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to reach out with love towards our Muslim neighbors and friends. That really is captured in this last comment by Ahmed El-Sherif as he describes the feeling of Muslims today:

VIDEO Islam 2

SLIDE 12 Islam

I would be proud to call a Muslim a friend or a neighbor. Today our congregation will have about 400 people here in worship. I wonder what could happen if 400 people are committed to praying to be a blessing to their Muslim neighbors and friends. What might happen if we demonstrated the love of Christ in tangible ways to let them see the Christ that we follow and love? That brings me to one final word from the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 20.

SLIDE 13 *So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us.*

What kind of ambassadors will you be? Let's pray.

Oh God we give you thanks and praise for the wideness of your mercy, for your goodness and your grace. We thank you that you long to be known by us and that you became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth. We thank you that you gave your life on the cross as a ransom for our sins to communicate to us the depth of your love and the depth of our need. We thank you for the resurrection and the life and hope

it brings to us.

Today we thank you for our Muslim friends and neighbors, and for their witness, teaching us about prayer and about submission and about giving. Oh lord we confess to you that we have not always been the ambassadors but you would call us to be. Because of our fear or are hate we have demonstrated not love but something far less. We confess to you that in our own Christian history there are those who have done terrible things in the name of Christ. Forgive us all Lord, and help us to demonstrate your love in Jesus name, Amen.