



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

OCTOBER 21, 2018

Discussion Guide

REAL CHRISTIANITY VS. ALMOST CHRISTIANITY

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- HOW WERE YOU TAUGHT TO LIVE A LIFE OF FAITH? WHAT WERE THE IMPORTANT HALLMARKS?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, DISCUSS THE NATURE OF CHRISTENDOM AND ITS STATE IN THE WORLD TODAY.
- READ MATTHEW 16.13-20 ALOUD. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE, SEEKING TO BE PRESENT, OBSERVING THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES.
- ACCORDING TO JESUS, WHAT IS THE BEDROCK OF HIS CHURCH? TO WHAT KIND OF LIFE DOES THIS BEDROCK LEAD HIS CHURCH? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ANSWERS AS POSSIBLE.
- CONSIDER THE BEDROCK OF THE CHURCH AND THE LIFE TO WHICH THIS BEDROCK LEADS. WOULD YOU SAY THIS IS THE

BEDROCK OF THE CHURCH TODAY? THE LIFE IT LEADS? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?

- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES CHRISTENDOM FIT OR NOT FIT WITH THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH AND THE LIFE TO WHICH THIS FOUNDATION LEADS? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- IN A WORLD WHERE CHRISTENDOM IS FADING, THE CHURCH FINDS ITSELF MOVING FROM BEING THE RULING MAJORITY TO A PROPHETIC MINORITY. THIS REQUIRES THE CHURCH TO RETHINK HOW IT NAVIGATES AND ENGAGES THE WORLD. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES THE PROSPECT OF THIS RETHINKING AFFECT YOU? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT MIGHT KEEP THE CHURCH FROM THIS KIND OF RETHINKING? WHAT MIGHT MAKE THIS RETHINKING POSSIBLE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO ENGAGE IN THIS RETHINKING WHILE SEEKING TO MAINTAIN A LOVING UNITY IN OUR FELLOWSHIPS OF BELIEVERS?
- CONSIDER CLOSING BY TAKING TIME TO PRAY FOR THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE AND FOR UNION CENTER AS WE SEEK TO DISCOVER WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE AS PEOPLE OF FAITH IN THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE.

CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND COMMENTARY

CHRISTENDOM

CHRISTENDOM HAS A NUMBER OF DEFINITIONS, EACH ONE DEPENDENT UPON WHETHER IT APPEARS IN A SECULAR, CATHOLIC, OR PROTESTANT CONTEXT. IN CERTAIN CONTEXTS, IT CAN MEAN THE COUNTRIES IN WHICH CHRISTIANITY REPRESENTS THE DOMINANT RELIGION OR WHERE ENOUGH CHRISTIANS ARE PRESENT TO ORGANIZE THEMSELVES IN SOME MANNER. HOWEVER, THE HISTORICAL SENSE OF THE WORD REFERS TO THE USE OF CHRISTIANITY AS A GEOPOLITICAL POWER. IN THIS SENSE, CHRISTENDOM EXISTS EVERYWHERE A GOVERNMENT UPHOLDS AND PROMOTES CHRISTIANITY. IN SUCH A SETTING, CHRISTIAN VALUES AND DOCTRINE INFUSE AND SHAPE

ALL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND LAWS. FURTHER, CLERGY AND CHRISTIAN LAITY WIELD POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN SETTINGS WHERE CHRISTENDOM EXISTS. THE VARIOUS FORMS OF THIS WIELDING OF AUTHORITY HAVE TAKEN DIFFERENT SHAPE ACROSS THE CENTURIES ALONG A CONTINUUM WHICH RANGES FROM THE CHURCH SERVING AS THE GOVERNMENT TO THE GOVERNMENT AGREEING TO PURSUE THE WILL OF THE CHURCH.

GENERALLY, HISTORIANS AND THEOLOGIANS AGREE CHRISTENDOM BEGAN WITH CONSTANTINE IN THE 4TH CENTURY. IN THE WORDS OF MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE, CHRIST FOUNDED CHRISTIANITY, BUT CONSTANTINE FOUNDED CHRISTENDOM. THEREFORE, SOME REFER TO CHRISTENDOM AS CONSTANTINIANISM. UNDER CONSTANTINE, AN UNSPOKEN AGREEMENT WAS MADE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE GOVERNMENT. AN UNDERSTANDING CAME INTO BEING WHICH CALLED UPON THE CHURCH TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT SO LONG AS THE GOVERNMENT PURSUED A SOCIETY BASED ON THE TEACHINGS AND ETHICS OF JESUS. WHILE UNSPOKEN, THIS UNION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND SECULAR POWER WAS VERY REAL AND BINDING, SO MUCH SO WESTERN SOCIETY KNEW NO OTHER WAY OF BEING FOR ALMOST 14 CENTURIES. HOWEVER, MORE RECENTLY, THIS UNSPOKEN ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND STATE HAS GROWN TENUOUS.

MOST HISTORIANS AND THEOLOGIANS NOW ARGUE CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD; THAT IS, MODERN GOVERNMENTS ARE NO LONGER INTERESTED IN UPHOLDING THE TEACHINGS, CUSTOMS, AND PRACTICES OF CHRISTIANITY. WHEN THIS IS THE CASE, BY DEFINITION, CHRISTENDOM NO LONGER EXISTS. WHEN CHRISTENDOM DIED IS A MATTER OF DEBATE. SOME HISTORIANS CLAIM IT IS NOW DEAD WHILE OTHERS ARGUE WE ARE WITNESSING THE DEATH THROES OF CHRISTENDOM IN THE PRESENT-DAY POLITICAL DRAMA NOW UNFOLDING. WHAT IS CLEAR IS, FOR AMERICA, OUR OWN FOUNDING DOCUMENTS SET THE STAGE FOR THE END OF CHRISTENDOM. THE FIRST AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION DRAWS A SHARP LINE BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE IN SUCH A WAY THAT CHRISTENDOM WAS DESTINED TO FALL IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT. THE FIRST AMENDMENT READS:

CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR PROHIBITING THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF; OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS; OR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE, AND TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES.

THE OPENING TWO LINES FORBIDDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION AND PROHIBITING SPEECH WERE THE DEATH NELL FOR AMERICAN CHRISTENDOM. BY FORBIDDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, THE FIRST AMENDMENT PROHIBITS THE GOVERNMENT FROM PURSUING AN AGENDA WHICH UPHOLDS THE TEACHINGS, CUSTOMS, AND ETHICS OF CHRISTIANITY OVER AND AGAINST OTHER RELIGIONS. FURTHER, BY GRANTING FREE SPEECH TO AMERICAN CITIZENS, THE FIRST AMENDMENT CLEARED THE WAY TO FORCE CHRISTIANITY TO SHARE THE PUBLIC FORUM GIVING RISE TO OTHER CULTURAL WAYS OF THINKING AND BEING. OVER TIME, THE

AMERICAN REPUBLIC TO WHICH THE FIRST AMENDMENT HAS GIVEN RISE IS SECULAR, ANTI-CLERICAL, AND, AT TIMES, OPPOSED TO THE VALUES, CUSTOMS, AND ETHOS OF CHRISTIANITY ITSELF.

THIS PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS HAS CAUGHT MANY CHRISTIANS BY SURPRISE, OFTEN THOSE WHO HAVE MAINTAINED THE NARRATIVE THAT AMERICA IS A CHRISTIAN NATION, NOT REALIZING THAT THE CONSTITUTION ITSELF DOES NOT GIVE CHRISTIANS A SEAT AT THE TABLE OF POWER BUT PREVENTS ANY RELIGION FROM HAVING A SEAT AT THE TABLE OF POWER. RECENT SUPREME COURT DECISIONS HAVE MADE CLEAR WHAT HAS BEEN A REALITY FOR SOME TIME. AMERICAN CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD. HOWEVER, THE MODERN POLITICAL DRAMA WHICH CATAPULTED DONALD TRUMP TO THE PRESIDENCY WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF 81% OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IS NOTHING SHORT OF AN ATTEMPT TO RESURRECT CHRISTENDOM. IN PART, THIS EFFORT IS DUE TO A CONFLATION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTENDOM IN THE MINDS OF MANY BELIEVERS. HOWEVER, CHRISTENDOM AND CHRISTIANITY ARE NOT THE SAME. CHRISTENDOM IS A SOCIO-POLITICAL REALITY WHILE CHRISTIANITY IS A RELIGION. RELIGIONS RISE AND FALL IN THEIR CULTURAL INFLUENCE. IN THE PRESENT WESTERN WORLD, CHRISTIANITY IS SHIFTING FROM THE RULING CULTURAL MAJORITY TO A PROPHETIC CULTURAL MINORITY. THIS REQUIRES NOT ONLY A RETHINKING OF ONE'S PLACE WITHIN CULTURE AS A CHRISTIAN BUT ALSO A RETHINKING OF HOW THE CHURCH GOES ABOUT RELATING TO AND NAVIGATING CULTURE.

THE TEXT

MATTHEW 16.13-20: SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL

AS EMOTIONAL BEINGS, OUR EMOTIONS PLAY AN IMPORTANT PART. HAVING BEEN CONFRONTED BY THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS (MATTHEW 16.1-4), JESUS WITHDREW WITH HIS DISCIPLES ACROSS THE SEA OF GALILEE. JESUS USED THIS TIME TO ENSURE HIS DISCIPLES RIGHTLY UNDERSTAND HIS MINISTRY AND ARE NOT INFECTED BY THE THINKING AND WAYS OF BEING OF THE PHARISEES AND THE SADDUCEES (MATTHEW 16.6). HE DOES THIS BY ENGAGING HIS DISCIPLES IN A CONVERSATION ABOUT HIS IDENTITY (MATTHEW 16.13-20) WHICH ALLOWS JESUS TO REDIRECT HIS DISCIPLES' THINKING ABOUT THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF GOD'S MESSIAH (MATTHEW 16.21-28).

DRAWING HIS DISCIPLES ASIDE, JESUS ASKS THEM TO TELL HIM WHO PEOPLE THOUGHT HE WAS. THE ANSWERS GIVEN REFLECT THAT MOST PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD JESUS' PROPHETIC MINISTRY AT A MINIMUM, AND SOME GRASPED HE WAS PART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT. THOSE WHO UNDERSTOOD JESUS AS A JEREMIAH-LIKE FIGURE VIEWED JESUS AS A PROPHET WHO FOCUSED ON JUDGMENT AND REPENTANCE, A PROPHET WHO WAS REJECTED BY THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT. THOSE WHO UNDERSTOOD JESUS AS ONE LIKE ELIJAH OR JOHN THE BAPTIST SAW AND HEARD SOMETHING MORE IN JESUS, SOMETHING WHICH POINTED TO THE CULMINATION OF A GREATER WORK OF GOD FOR HIS PEOPLE (MALACHI 3.21).

HEARING THE REPORT CONCERNING THE THINKING OF THE CROWDS, JESUS INQUIRED ABOUT THE THINKING OF HIS DISCIPLES. PETER SPOKE UP ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP NOTING THEY BELIEVED JESUS TO BE

THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD. WHILE PETER'S REPLY TAKES THE FORM OF A TITLE, THIS TITLE REPRESENTS A LARGER NARRATIVE RUNNING THROUGH THE MINDS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. IT WAS A NARRATIVE WHICH LOOKED FORWARD TO A HUMAN AGENT OF GOD WHO WOULD FUNCTION AS GOD'S DELIVERER AND KING, RULING OVER HIS PEOPLE IN ZION, THE REESTABLISHED CITY OF GOD OR NEW JERUSALEM.

JESUS AFFIRMS PETER'S ANSWER AS CORRECT, AND NOTES GOD HAD REVEALED THIS TO PETER BECAUSE PRESENTLY HUMANITY DID NOT RECOGNIZE JESUS AS SUCH. HOWEVER, JESUS LEANS INTO PETER'S ANSWER INDICATING THAT THERE ARE DEEPER IMPLICATIONS TO JESUS' IDENTITY AND THE REDEMPTIVE STORY WHICH IT REPRESENTS. JESUS MAKES A PLAY ON THE WORD "ROCK," CALLING PETER A ROCK AND STATING HE WOULD BUILD HIS CHURCH ON THIS ROCK. MUCH DEBATE HAS BEEN HAD CONCERNING THIS WORD PLAY. TRADITIONALLY, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS ARGUED THAT JESUS MAKES PETER THE FIRST POPE WHILE PROTESTANTS HAVE ARGUED THAT THE CHURCH IS BASED ON THE CONFESSION OF JESUS AS MESSIAH. MOST-LIKELY, THE ANSWER IS SOMEWHERE IN-BETWEEN. LINGUISTICALLY, IT DOES APPEAR THAT JESUS IS EQUATING PETER WITH THE "ROCK," BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN PETER IS THE FIRST POPE. RATHER, THE SIMPLEST UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEXT REQUIRES PETER TO FUNCTION AS THE FIRST OF MANY PEOPLE WHO WILL MAKE UP THE CHURCH, A PEOPLE WHO AGREE TO BE PART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT, LIVING WITH JESUS AS THEIR KING. IT IS THIS KIND OF LIFE, A LIFE WHICH IS PART OF THE REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT OF GOD WITH JESUS AS KING WHICH FORMS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH.

FOUNDATIONS ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE THEY GIVE SHAPE TO A BUILDING. FOUNDATIONS DEFINE WHAT IS AND CAN BE WITH RESPECT TO A BUILDING. THEREFORE, IT IS THIS REDEMPTIVE STORY OF GOD WITH JESUS AS KING WHICH GIVES SHAPE TO THE CHURCH. SOMETIMES WE CALL THIS REDEMPTIVE STORY WHICH RESULTS IN JESUS BEING KING THE GOSPEL. ACCORDING TO JESUS, THE CHURCH SHAPED BY THIS FOUNDATION WILL HAVE POWER OVER THE GATES OF HELL AND BE ABLE TO BRING ABOUT PERMANENT KINGDOM REALITIES IN THE WORLD. WHILE MUCH DEBATE HAS BEEN HAD OVER THE EXACT MEANING OF THESE VERSES, WHAT IS CLEAR IS THE CHURCH SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL HAS MUCH POWER TO INFLUENCE THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT. IN OTHER WORDS, THE CHURCH SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL ACTIVELY ENGAGES THE WORLD IN SUCH A WAY THAT KINGDOM REALITIES TAKE SHAPE.

LUKE 10.25-37: LOVE GETS MESSY

LUKE 10 RECORDS AN INTERACTION BETWEEN JESUS AND A RELIGIOUS EXPERT (SCRIBE) CONCERNING HOW TO LIVE TO OBTAIN ETERNAL LIFE, THE "MORE" OF LIFE WHICH GOD IS MOVING REDEMPTIVELY TO PROVIDE. HEARING THE SCRIBE'S QUESTION, JESUS POINTS HIM BACK TO THE MOSAIC LAW, ASKING WHAT THE LAW HAD TO SAY IN REPOSE TO THE QUESTION. THE SCRIBE NOTES THAT THE LAW REQUIRED ONE TO LOVE GOD AND ONE'S NEIGHBOR (DEUTERONOMY 6.5; LEVITICUS 19.18). JESUS AGREES THAT THIS IS THE TRUE

TEACHING OF THE LAW AND THAT ETERNAL LIFE IS AVAILABLE TO THOSE WHO DO WHAT THE LAW SAYS CONCERNING LOVING GOD AND ONE'S NEIGHBOR.

THE SCRIBE IS NOT SATISFIED WITH JESUS' ANSWER BECAUSE IT REQUIRES OBEDIENCE WITHOUT QUALIFICATION. WHILE NOT SPECIFICALLY STATED, IT IS CLEAR THE SCRIBE HAS SOME IDEA ABOUT QUALIFYING THE LOVING OF ONE'S NEIGHBOR WHICH HE WANTS TO JUSTIFY, DECLARE RIGHT. HE ASKS JESUS TO CLARIFY WHAT HE MEANS BY NEIGHBOR TO SEE IF HIS OWN PERSONAL VIEW IS CORRECT IN JESUS' EYES. IN RESPONSE, JESUS TELLS A PARABLE ABOUT A KIND SAMARITAN WHO SHOWS MERCY TO A JEW WHO HAD BEEN WAYLAID BY THIEVES. THE SAMARITANS WERE SOME OF THE LEAST RESPECTED PEOPLE BY THE JEWS BECAUSE THEY WERE A PEOPLE WHO WERE NOT FULLY JEWISH NOR DID THEY HOLD TO A TRADITIONAL FORM OF JUDAISM, A RESULT OF THE ASSYRIAN INVASION IN THE 8TH CENTURY. SUCH PEOPLE WERE UNCLEAN AND TO BE AVOIDED.

IN JESUS' STORY, THIS UNCLEAN PERSON IS THE ONE WHO LOVES HIS NEIGHBOR. JESUS' PARABLE WHICH MAKES THE SAMARITAN THE HERO IS INSTRUCTIVE ON SEVERAL LEVELS. FIRST, BY MAKING THE SAMARITAN THE HERO IN OPPOSITION TO A PRIEST AND LEVITE, JESUS REBUKES THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT. IN OTHER WORDS, THE SCRIBE CANNOT LOOK TO THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT IF HE WANTS TO DISCOVER HOW GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE. WHILE THESE PEOPLE KNEW THE LITERAL WORD OF GOD, THEIR PRACTICE HAD BECOME CORRUPT IN THEIR PURSUIT OF POWER THROUGH COLLUSION WITH THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT. SECOND, THE SAMARITAN AS THE HERO OF THE STORY INDICATES THAT GOD DESIRES HIS PEOPLE TO BE WILLING TO CROSS SOCIAL AND RACIAL LINES, AS WELL AS GIVE SACRIFICIALLY OF THEMSELVES FOR THEIR ENEMY IN REAL AND PRACTICAL WAYS IN THEIR SHOWING OF LOVE. THIS WAS THE BEHAVIOR WHICH EXEMPLIFIED THE LOVE OF ONE'S NEIGHBOR AND JESUS ENCOURAGED THE SCRIBE TO ACT IN A SIMILAR MANNER.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

HOW AM I TO LIVE AS A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO NAVIGATE THIS WORLD AS A PERSON OF FAITH? I KNOW. AS A PASTOR, I SHOULD PROBABLY NOT BE ASKING THESE QUESTIONS, BUT I AM. I AM ASKING, BECAUSE WHAT I WAS TAUGHT NO LONGER SEEMS TO BE WORKING. PERHAPS IT NEVER REALLY WORKED. I WAS TAUGHT THAT GOOD FOLLOWERS OF JESUS READ THEIR BIBLES, ATTENDED CHURCH, AND WERE GOOD CITIZENS. I AM NOT AGAINST ANY OF THESE THINGS, BUT WHAT I SEE IS THEY ARE NOT LEADING THE CHURCH TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON OUR WORLD. WE READ OUR BIBLES, WORSHIP, AND SERVE AS GOOD CITIZENS AS WE WATCH THE KINGDOM IMPACT OF CHRIST GROW EVER SMALLER. LAST TIME I CHECKED, GOD'S KINGDOM WAS TO GROW, NOT SHRINK. SOMETHING IS OFF. SO, WHAT IS GOING ON?

I THINK A LARGE PART OF THE ISSUE CAN BE FOUND IN THE SEISMIC SHIFT WHICH WE ARE NOW EXPERIENCING IN OUR CULTURE. IT IS ALMOST LIKE WE ARE DOROTHY IN OZ, ONLY NO ONE CAN POINT TO

THE TORNADO WHICH GOT US THERE. IT IS LIKE ONE DAY WE WOKE UP AND RECOGNIZED WE WERE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE. THE WORLD WE KNEW OR THOUGHT WE KNEW WAS GONE, AND THE WAY WE LIVED DIDN'T FIT WHERE WE NOW FOUND OURSELVES. IT CAN BE QUITE DISORIENTING TO FIND OURSELVES IN THIS SITUATION, AND WE ARE TEMPTED TO REACT, OFTEN WITH ANGER. WHO CHANGED THE RULES? LET'S GET THEM! HOWEVER, TO REACT IN THIS MANNER IS FAR FROM THE BEST RESPONSE. IT IS TO ALLOW OUR EMOTIONS TO DRIVE THE BUS INSTEAD OF MAKING ROOM FOR A DIALOGUE BETWEEN WHAT WE KNOW AND FEEL. THE PROBLEM IS WE ARE NOT SURE WHAT WE KNOW. WE CAN'T MAKE ROOM FOR THIS DIALOGUE UNTIL WE CAN NAME THE SEISMIC SHIFT WHICH WE ARE EXPERIENCING.

PERHAPS THE BEST WAY TO DESCRIBE THE SEISMIC SHIFT IN CULTURE WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES IN IS A SERIES OF DEATH THROES, THE DEATH THROES OF CHRISTENDOM. JUST TO BE CLEAR. CHRISTENDOM IS NOT THE SAME THING AS CHRISTIANITY. JESUS FOUNDED CHRISTIANITY. EMPEROR CONSTANTINE FOUNDED CHRISTENDOM. CHRISTENDOM IS A SOCIO-POLITICAL REALITY IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT AGREES TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE THE VALUES, CUSTOMS, AND ETHICS OF CHRISTIANITY IN RETURN FOR THE PATRIOTISM OF THE CHURCH. IN SUCH A SETTING, GOVERNMENT LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS ARE INFUSED WITH THE TEACHING AND ETHICS OF JESUS IN SUCH A MANNER THE CHURCH EFFECTIVELY HANDS OFF THE MORAL AND CULTURAL AGENDA OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE GOVERNMENT SO ALL THE CHURCH MUST DO IS ENGAGE IN ACTS OF PIETY LIKE WORSHIP AND BIBLE READING. HOWEVER, WE DON'T LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE CHRISTENDOM IS ALIVE AND WELL. WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD AND DYING, A WORLD WHERE GOVERNMENTS ARE NOT INTERESTED IN UPHOLDING AND PROMOTING THE VALUES, CUSTOMS, AND ETHICS OF CHRISTIANITY. IN OTHER WORDS, WE FIND OURSELVES IN A SECULAR SOCIETY WHICH IS INDIFFERENT AND AT TIMES ANTAGONISTIC TO THE MORAL AND CULTURAL AGENDA OF CHRISTIANITY. ONE MIGHT SAY, CHRISTIANITY IS NO LONGER THE MORAL MAJORITY BUT THE PROPHETIC MINORITY. THE PROBLEM IS, WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO LIVE IN THIS REALITY.

WE COULD GO ROUND AND ROUND ABOUT WHETHER THIS REALITY IS GOOD OR BAD. I AM A THE SUPER-PRAGMATIST. IT IS AND THERE IS LITTLE HOPE OF TURNING IT AROUND. OUR OWN NATION'S FOUNDING DOCUMENTS HAVE CREATED THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE. RATHER THAN SPENDING MY TIME TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE UP THE MORAL AND CULTURAL AGENDA OF CHRISTIANITY ONCE MORE, I WOULD RATHER SPEND MY TIME FIGURING OUT HOW TO TAKE UP THIS AGENDA MYSELF. IT IS AFTER ALL, MINE TO BEGIN WITH. IT WASN'T UNTIL THE 4TH CENTURY THAT THE CHURCH HANDED IT OFF TO THE GOVERNMENT. IN MANY WAYS, THE SITUATION IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES IS A GIFT, AN INVITATION TO RETURN TO WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE CHURCH. HOWEVER, THIS MEANS WE MUST ASK HARD QUESTIONS LIKE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE THE CHURCH? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE AS PEOPLE OF FAITH? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE IN SUCH A WAY THAT GOD'S KINGDOM MIGHT COME AND HIS WILL MIGHT BE DONE? THESE ARE HARD QUESTIONS

THAT REQUIRE US NOT ONLY TO DIG DEEP WITHIN OURSELVES BUT TO ALLOW GOD TO CHANGE OUR GRID FOR HOW WE NAVIGATE THE WORLD. PERSONALLY, THIS FRIGHTENS ME BECAUSE SUCH DEEP CHANGE IS NEVER EASY OR FREE FROM PAIN OR STRUGGLE. BUT, I LONG TO SEE GOD'S KINGDOM COME AND HIS WILL BE DONE. SO, I AM OPEN TO THE CHANGE.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

HOW ARE WE TO LIVE AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS IN THIS WORLD? THERE WAS A TIME IN WHICH IT WAS EASY TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION. YOU READ YOUR BIBLE. YOU ATTENDED A LOCAL CHURCH. YOU WERE A GOOD CITIZEN. THEN EVERYTHING CHANGED. NO ONE IS REALLY SURE WHEN IT ALL CHANGED. IT IS ALMOST AS IF WE WOKE UP ONE DAY AND WE FOUND OURSELVES IN A STRANGE LAND. ACTUALLY, THE CHANGE HAS BEEN COMING FOR OVER 200 YEARS, BUT WE WERE NOT PAYING ATTENTION, AND NOW THERE IS NO GOING BACK. PERHAPS, IT IS GOOD THAT WE CAN'T GO BACK. WHAT WE NEED IS TO FIGURE OUT A WAY FORWARD. THE BIGGEST ISSUE WE FACE IN THE WORLD IN WHICH WE NOW FIND OURSELVES IS ONE WHICH INVOLVES THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT. THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE GOVERNMENT WAS WILLING TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE THE MORAL, SOCIAL, AND ETHICAL VISION OF CHRISTIANITY. WE DON'T LIVE IN THAT WORLD ANYMORE. WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE WE ARE NOW THE MINORITY. RATHER THAN TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO BEND THE MAJORITY TO OUR WILL, IT IS BETTER HOW TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO LIVE AS THAT MINORITY. HOW DO WE LIVE AS THE CHURCH? THIS IS A DIFFICULT PROCESS BECAUSE IT WILL REQUIRE US TO BE OPEN, TO BE TEACHABLE, TO ALLOW GOD TO REARRANGE OUR GRID FOR NAVIGATING THIS WORLD. THIS IS DIFFICULT FOR MANY OF US, BUT THIS IS ACTUALLY THE ESSENCE OF THE JOURNEY OF FAITH. THE JOURNEY OF FAITH IS ALL ABOUT CHANGE, MOVING FROM THE PEOPLE WE ARE TO THE PEOPLE WE ARE MEANT TO BE. WHILE THE PLACE WHERE WE FIND OURSELVES IS PAINFUL, IT IS ALSO NECESSARY IN OUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S SANCTIFYING WORK. THIS WEEK, TAKE SOME TIME TO CONSIDER HOW WILLING YOU ARE TO OPEN YOURSELF TO GOD'S SANCTIFYING (CHANGING) WORK. ARE YOU WILLING TO BE OPEN AND TEACHABLE? ARE YOU WILLING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU UNDERSTAND AND INTERACT WITH THE WORLD? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE? WHAT MIGHT STAND IN THE WAY OF BEING OPEN IN THIS WAY? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO BE OPEN IN THIS WAY? TAKE TIME THIS WEEK TO EXPLORE THESE QUESTIONS. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER EXPLORING THEM WITH OTHERS AND JOURNALING YOUR THOUGHTS.



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