

## September 27 *the connection* liturgy Discussion Questions

Brian McLaren begins by stating that 'Our biggest problem isn't our differences. Our biggest problem is that we build identity (whatever our religion) by enforcing hostility toward the other; in other words, I learn who I am by learning who I am against. I learn who I am by learning who is against me. When your identity is oppositional, when your identity is based in the fear of the other...you have an inherently hostile identity.'

-Have you seen, or heard, or experienced oppositional hostility within Christianity? If you're comfortable, can you share an example?

-What has primarily shaped your faith identity or your thinking around what it means to be Christian? Are there, or were there, pieces of that formation that feed into oppositional identity? Are there pieces of that formation that lead to an *us versus them* mentality? If you're comfortable, can you share an example?

McLaren asks, 'Can we find a way of holding Christian identity that sends us towards the other with love and hospitality rather than with fear and hostility?'

-What do you think contributes to a Christian identity that is rooted in fear and hostility?

-What do you think contributes to a Christian identity that is rooted in love and hospitality?

-How would you answer his question? Do you see it as being possible or impossible? Why or why not?

McLaren identifies four challenges to Christianity where rethinking and reimagining could help collectively move us the direction of love and hospitality and away from fear and hostility.

The Historic Challenge:

McLaren said, 'We know about the Crusades, a lot of us don't really know about a lot of other examples of our hostility – for example what happened to the Native Peoples of the Americas, the conquest of those peoples. The fusion of Christian faith and Colonialism. When we face that history it will cause us to ask some deep questions about our own identity. We (Christians) need to ask why in the name of Christ we did horribly un-Christlike things – we did anti-Christ things in the name of Christ?'

-How does knowing (our) Christian history relate to understanding Christian identity?

-Can you think of any *anti-Christ things done in the name of Christ* that continue to impact how Christians are viewed? How do those 'anti-Christ' things get made right?

-Have you seen, or heard, or experienced any current *anti-Christ actions done in the name of Christ*? If you're comfortable, can you give an example? How do you work at addressing those things or bring healing to the hurt or pushing for justice?

## The Doctrinal Challenge

Consider the examples of the doctrines McLaren reviewed – creation, original sin, and election. He believes they can and have been used destructively instead of being used as ‘tools for healing’.

- Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?
- Have you seen, or heard, or experienced doctrine being used as a weapon of hostility? If you're comfortable, can you share an example?
- How can doctrine be used as a tool for healing?
- What comes to mind about the way doctrine is used at the connection? Are there conversations that we should be having about doctrine and how it is being used as weapon rather than a tool for healing?

## The Liturgical Challenge:

McLaren suggests that our liturgical practices can either reinforce an identity of hostility or they can build in us a deeper sense of solidarity and hospitality.

- How can liturgical practices reinforce an identity of hostility?
- How can liturgical practices build a deeper sense of solidarity and hospitality?
- What do you think the liturgical practices as *the connection* suggest about us as a community? Are there practices you think we should add or take away? If you're comfortable, can you share an example?

## The Missional Challenge:

McClaren suggests that, ‘We need to shed the idea that the only legitimate thing for a committed Christian to do to a member of another religion is to try and convert them, as if there is no value in neighbourliness if it isn't just used as a connection for attempted conversion. We're at a point where if we're going to face the problems that threaten our future we're going to have to learn to be collaborators with people of other faiths. We're going to have to reach into our faith and find resources that we bring to the table and invite others to the table to work together for the common good. That is going to require us to rethink God's presence in the world, of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world.’

He then asks, ‘Can we now come together in even bigger ways as Christians working together with Muslims and Jews and Hindus and Buddhists and atheists and allow ourselves to see how the Holy Spirit can work through us together for the common good of all?’

- Why do you think there is so much emphasis put on converting people rather than befriending and loving them? How would you respond to the sentiment that *if you really loved someone you would tell them that they are going to hell?*
- What does it look like to be a community that cultivates love and hospitality in the name of Jesus?
- What places do you think we should be promoting respect, building bridges, and extending dignity – even if there may be a cost for being a ‘peacemaker’?