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Spiritual Migration: A Better Way to Be Christian”

Matthew 23:25-28

Jude 1:3

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We have been doing it for two thousand years. From our evolutionary birthplace in East Africa, our most ancient ancestors spread west and south across Africa, then north across the Middle East, some then heading west across Europe and others heading east across Asia, eventually arriving in North America and quickly spreading through Central and South America. Even now, above us, human beings have migrated to space, and many of us dream of voyages to distant planets and even to other star systems. To be human is to move. To be human is to change.

Today, Christianity is in need of movement and change. We can move the faith to a better place and become better Christians. Brian McLaren in his book, Spiritual Migration lays out what will need to happen:

- Christianity has reduced its core identity to a collection of core beliefs. Yet, these list of unchanging beliefs should not define what it means to a follower of Christ. Instead, we must move to a way of life centered on love, following the life and teaching of Jesus, a way of life centered on love.
- Then, if we are to live into this new way of life, we must deal with how God has been interpreted as a violent God and that God favors some people and disfavoring or rejecting others, which has led to a justification for perpetuating violence in the world. Instead, we must move toward the loving God, revealed in Jesus who is for all of us and not against any of us. We must move away

from those methods of interpreting Scripture that hinder that vision of a loving God shining through.

- Lastly, spiritual migration asks us to move from religion being organized for self-perpetuation toward religion organized for the common good.

These three shifts will help us as individuals and groups rethink the Christian faith, of God, and the practice of religion so as to migrate to a new way of life based on love.

The questions remains to be asked: Why do religious people tend to settle down and stop moving, stop dreaming, stop questioning, stop exploring?

Could the current state of Christianity be like this parable about a can of Coke? You call customer service and report that your Coke tastes terrible. The customer service agent asks about the appearance of the can, and you say that it looks shiny and red and normal. The customer service agent says that the most important thing is whether the can is intact and then asks about the cardboard box that held the cans. You reply that it was also perfectly normal, with all the logos in the right place. The customer service agent says that everything sounds fine and thanks you for calling! In this parable, it seems like the customer service agent has missed the point – it's what is inside the can that matters, not the can or the packaging. Does this same principle need to be applied to Christianity? What are the qualities of Christianity that really matter aside from all the institutions and structures and systems of belief?

Let's face it. At times, Christianity has suffered at the hands of Christians, because it has been turned into a rigid system of beliefs, and no longer reflect the way of life of love taught and

lived by Jesus. If we are to take Paul's words to Jude to heart, this way of love is worth fighting for.

We Christians, you might say, are the greatest threat to the Christian faith. Christians can be blinded by wealth, greed, misguided by religious or political leaders, polluted by un-Christ-like attitudes, kidnapped by ideology, or numbed by comfort and apathy. As a result, we can receive and pass on version of the faith that are distorted with racism or twisted by greed or fear. Could it be that if we love our faith and even more to the point love Jesus and really want to follow him, doesn't it then mean we need to protect it from dangers like these.

In many ways Jesus has been kidnapped, and we need to fight to get him back. He has been portrayed by white supremacists as their leader (strange no, wasn't he Middle Eastern). His name has been used in the subjugation and abuse of women. He has been said to have selected and ordained men to run everything, especially one's household and the church (strange no, didn't he entrust most important message, that of resurrection to women first and were they not numbered right there alongside the twelve disciples). What is needed to reinstate the Jesus we know in Scripture, is not paying the ransom, but rather taking him back which involves a fight!

The Christian faith is what Christians make of it – ugly or beautiful, judgmental or gracious, complacent or energetic, selfish or generous.

Does Christianity need a conversion? We have for centuries concentrated on others having a conversion. Maybe it's time for Christians to have a conversion. It seems like now is the time for the Christian faith to have a reboot.

The writer of the Gospel of Matthew uses fighting words, in the woe oracle read this morning. This pronouncement of Jesus is not just meant for the Pharisees and religious leaders, those listening to Jesus at that time, but it is for anyone who is reading the gospel of Matthew. The point: match the contents with the container. Christianity has focused on polishing and perfecting its outer wrappings without addressing the troubling theology and beliefs that have grown up in its core.

Let us pray.

Living God, please teach us to abhor what is evil and love what is good. Help us to discern and leave behind imperfect and immature elements in the version of faith we were given. And help us, together with other disciples of Jesus, to embody and pass on a vibrant version of the faith that will empower future generations to live wisely and well.