

Coming Together as One

“To bring all things in heaven and on earth together under Christ”
Ephesians 1:3-10

A new generation is arising that thinks globally from Malala in Pakistan to our own twentysomethings. They travel everywhere just because they want to, just because they can, just because this is what interests them. They seek a world coming together, in the words of Diana Butler Bass in her book *Christianity after Religion* (pp.5-6), as one “global community based on shared human connection, dedicated to the care of our planet, committed to justice and equality, that seeks to raise hundreds of millions from poverty, violence, and oppression.” Their anthem could be the 1985 song “We Are The World,” written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie:

There comes a time when we heed a certain call
 When the world must come together as one
 There are people dying
 And it's time to lend a hand to life
 The greatest gift of all

We are the world, we are the children
 We are the ones who make a brighter day
 So let's start giving
 There's a choice we're making
 We're saving our own lives
 It's true we'll make a better day
 Just you and me.

Now I'll grant that not everyone feels this way especially in older generations. There are still many who are partisan in their thinking, who seek only their own welfare and the welfare of those who are like them and think like them. There are still many who find some kind of joy in bitter polarized politics. There are still many who contribute to patterns of prejudice and discrimination. There are still many who are essentially tribal in their thinking, who listen only to people they already agree with, who live in an echo chamber of their own narrow construction.

But fewer and fewer twentysomethings are buying this. What they seek, again in the words of Diana Butler Bass (p.4), are “new forms of community that address global concerns of human flourishing.” I love that concept – community that addresses global concerns of human flourishing. And so it's great good news that this is what Jesus was and is all about, as the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 1:10, that it's God's intent “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” This, Paul says, is the point of it all, the point of history, the point of the cosmos: to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under Christ. In a world filled with narrow partisan thinking, with plain old-fashioned slander, with the most negative, most divisive, most irreverent things said over and over on the air waves and online, demonizing those we disagree with, dividing over any point of difference, the point of it all is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under Christ.

Under Christ? Here we can get confused. Jesus has for so long been used for partisan, sectarian purposes that's it's hard to remember that this was never his intent. So it's important to remember that this text, like a number of others, does not make sense until we remember that Jesus was the most inclusive person who ever lived. Remember: It is Jesus who tells us to drop our anger. It is Jesus who tells us to see things as they really are and stop judging others. It is Jesus who tells us to let go and trust God always, in all circumstances. It is Jesus who tells us to feed the hungry and give shelter to the homeless. It is Jesus who offers to all men and women everywhere whoever they are or whatever they have done the opportunity to start over, be reborn, be forgiven, and then to discover within themselves the Spirit of God.

It is Jesus who tells us to forgive those who sin against us. It is Jesus who tells us to fraternize with those dismissed as "sinners." It is Jesus who tells us to take seriously and respect the outcasts in society. It is Jesus who tells us to love even our enemies. And it is Jesus who tells us to applaud those whose faith exceeds that of our own communities of faith.

You see, Jesus was the most inclusive person who ever lived. He didn't get crucified for being too exclusive. He was crucified at least in part for welcoming sinners and prostitutes and tax collectors and Roman centurions into the kingdom of God. And it was his intent by his death to draw all people to God (John 12:32). Jesus' way is always the way of inclusion. It's the way of mercy and grace, trust and compassion, joy and peace. And it's in this way that all things in heaven and on earth are brought together.

And it's this global vision that Millennials seek today. They reject what is sectarian in a twenty-first-century sense, what was denominational in an early nineteenth-century sense. Instead, they seek coming together as "a global community based on shared human connections, dedicated to the care of the planet, committed to justice and equality, that seeks to raise hundreds of millions from poverty, violence and oppression." They seek "new forms of community that address global concerns of human flourishing."

Now this has always been the biblical vision. It's what Isaiah saw (in Isaiah 11:6-9) – that one day the wolf would live with the lamb, the leopard would lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together and a little child would lead them; that one day the cow would feed with the bear, their young would lie down together, and the lion would eat straw like the ox; that one day they would neither harm nor destroy on God's holy mountain for the earth would be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Elsewhere Isaiah pictures (in 2:4) nations beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nations not taking up sword against nation, not even training for war anymore, and (in 9:6-7) a child being born, a Prince of Peace, of the increase of whose peace there will be no end.

Isaiah pictures a complete reversal of things, a new creation. Those who were once the most helpless and vulnerable will be at ease with those who were once the most brutal and violent. As Paul says in Romans 8:18-23, creation itself is liberated. And even a child can lead, a child, not a strutting world leader. The earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord. A world grown old in sophistication, cynicism and violence will find its salvation in innocence, simplicity and trust. It's what Daniel saw – that God's kingdom would fill the whole earth (Daniel 2). It's what Zechariah saw – that God's rule would extend from sea to sea (Zechariah 9). It's what Jesus saw

– that his kingdom of love and forgiveness, like the smallest of seeds, would become the largest of plants, like yeast, transforming everything it touches (Matthew 13). It's what Paul saw – that the many would be made righteous (Romans 5). It's what John saw – that there will reign on earth a great multitude that no one count (Revelation 5, 7).

It's what Millennials see:

a world coming together
in global community
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We are called then in months ahead, in years ahead, to get this message out; to let go of old ways of prejudice and discrimination, sectarian thinking, tribal thinking; to stand up to the voices of anger that seek to divide us; so that when people today seek a world coming together as one, based on shared human connections, dedicated to global flourishing, they know that this is the will of God, that it's always been the will of God; and that this church believes this. And if we mean this, and live this, and teach this, and work toward this, there will be a new world in the morning.

– Dale Pauls