

Sermon Starter – Claiming Christ, Loving All: Christian Commitment in a Pluralistic World

John 14:5-11 and Matthew 7:1-5

We live in tension: the tension of claiming the utter uniqueness of Jesus Christ while at the same time wanting to be open and loving, not wanting to contribute to the hateful and fear-producing rhetoric as so many Christians before us have done. These two Scriptures have been selected as a way to illustrate the tension we feel. On one hand, we believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We believe that we come to understand God by understanding Jesus; we come to know God by knowing this person, Jesus.

At the same time, we have been told not to stand in judgment of one another, to not be the religious elite who, to the detriment of their own faith development, point out the speck in their neighbor's eye. This Jesus whom we seek to follow instructs us to not relate to others with a spirit of judgment, to be a people slow to condemn. This is the hard tension we live with. It is a real tension, and a tension not easily put to rest. I am not exactly sure how we resolve this tension, but an impactful sermon might explore how you (as pastor, as Christian) or how your congregation seeks to lean into this tension rather than how we resolve it for all time. How do you seek to lean into this tension in your community and as a follower of Christ?

Some themes to explore with regard to leaning into such a tension might include:

1. *Using the metaphors of both journey and home.* In their introduction to the book *Youth Ministry at a Crossroads* (Herald Press), Andy Brubacher Kaethler and Bob Yoder recognize the need for both these metaphors in healthy faith development. We often use "faith journey" as a primary metaphor, but "home" is equally as vital. For children to develop in a healthy way, they need a sense of home—a safe place of belonging where they know they are loved and cared for. It is at home where we begin to understand and make sense of the world. Home provides us with boundaries, with limits that help us make meaning. From our spiritual home, we can safely begin to journey outward to explore other ways of knowing and being known.
2. *Be who we are.* As we interact with people of other faiths, we must name things we hold in common as well as be honest about where we are different—how we see the world differently and how we understand God differently. We must be honest about our differences, but in an open, respectful, and humble way, remembering that Christ frequently critiqued the pious religious leaders of his day.

3. *Being a people of passion.* If we want our faith to be passed down, if we want our world to be transformed by the love of God, it will not happen by trying to shield our children from the teachings of Buddhists and Muslims and atheists. It will happen if we are a people of passion, a people who are continually trying to live out our commitment to God in Christ.

From Leader, Summer 2014. ©2014 MennoMedia.