



The Emerging Christian Way

Session 2

Welcome! In this session we will reflect on Chapter 6, "On Being a Postdenominational Priest in a Postdenominational Era" by Matthew Fox.

Lenten Book Study
St. James United Church, Etobicoke

Group or Individual Reflection

Reading

(To be read aloud by a member of the group)

"When our hearts are closed we have a darkened mind; we lack compassion and are out of touch with the suffering of others."

"When our hearts are open, we are alive to wonder; we live with a spirit of gratitude and we are compassionate as God is compassionate ... [the open heart] is turned toward God, living with grace and a spontaneous appreciation of the miracles of creation."

- Tim Scorer, p. 41

In Samaria Jesus came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the trip, sat down by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water. 8 His disciples had gone into town to buy food. The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan—so how can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.) Jesus answered, "If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water." "Sir," the woman said, "you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his children and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?" Jesus answered, "Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life." "Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water." "Go and call your husband," Jesus told her, "and come back." "I don't have a husband," she answered.

Jesus replied, "You are right when you say you don't have a husband. You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth." "I see you are a prophet, sir," the woman said. "My Samaritan ancestors worshiped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is." The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus answered, "I am he, I who am talking with you."

At that moment Jesus' disciples returned, and they were greatly surprised to find him talking with a woman. But none of them said to her, "What do you want?" or asked him, "Why are you talking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there, "Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?" (John 4:5-29 Today's English Version)



Matthew Fox

“Postdenominationalism is about ... setting aside our boxes to the extent that they are neither challenging us nor nourishing us deeply anymore, or to the extent that they are interfering with the pressing earth issues of our time.”

p. 104

Meditation

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following:

One of the beautiful aspects of the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman is the openness it reflects; two people talking heart to heart, ignoring distinctions of male and female, of culture, of status.

Think of a moment in your life when you experienced that kind of openness and honesty. What allowed that to happen? What would need to happen for you to have that sense of speaking heart to heart? If you have not had that kind of experience with God, what could you bring from your life experience to create a prayerful atmosphere, where you and God could have a heart to heart conversation?

Prayer

(All together.)

Breathe in and say, I open my heart to your presence, God.

Breathe out and say, You are the light of my path, breath of my being.

Breathe in and say, I open my life to your shaping

Breathe out and say, You are source of my hope, grace of my healing

Amen.

Source: Tim Scorer, p.42

Time of Sharing

Complete the sentence: I felt most welcome when ...

Questions for Reflection

1. What are or were your first impressions of this chapter? What did you like about the chapter? What did you find that was reassuring? What was disturbing? Why?
2. How does it relate to your own experience of Christianity or denominationalism? Or does it? How post-denominational are you? What difference would it make to you if your church became more post-denominational? What would it look like?
3. Do denominations have a role to play today? Can you be a member of a denomination, or be a church of a particular denomination and still be post-denominational? What is at stake? Reflect on Fox's comment, "While traditions and local roots matter, these are all traditions spelled with a small t." p. 107
4. Fox introduces the following commitments he has decided to make to replace the vows he once took as a Roman Catholic priest:

“Instead of a vow of poverty, I make a renewed commitment to living a sustainable lifestyle

Instead of a vow of obedience, I make a renewed commitment to reinvigorating democracy and small communities.

Instead of a vow of celibacy, I make a renewed commitment to reverence in

all my relationships.”

How do you react to the change? How are his commitments reflective of a transformational attitude?

5. How do you react to this rephrasing of Pere Chenu’s statement on page 107: “The church of today and tomorrow must make itself into a dialogue with those who think they are unable to believe”? If we were to explore that idea, how would we begin? What would our church look like?

6. Fox writes,

“Postdenominationalism also means that denominations are far less important for spirituality today than are our professions. It is at work more than at church that real moral—and immoral—decisions are being rendered about the health of our planet our bodies our children our very souls.” p 114.

If this is the case, how does the church respond to this reality? What can we be doing?

7. For Fox worship is at the centre of a transformational paradigm, through the arts and creative expression beyond the text “we celebrate because we are.” “Why shouldn’t there be wonder and beauty everywhere when we worship? .. The relationships between things is named and celebrated and nothing is left out, especially not the Source of All Things.” (p127). “Worship ought to be the energy source from which a people heals itself and lets go and starts over.” (p. 130) Have you had a transformational experience of worship? What needs to be in place for worship to be transformational?



“Postdenominationalism recognizes the closeness we feel to one another when we are all energized in the search for mysticism and the struggle for justice.”

p. 111

Notes:

“We all want to climb across new portals, be ushered into new rooms and vistas where our hearts and souls can experience awe anew and fall in love again. ... Art is not itself the new vista; it is (merely) the door to the new perception”

- p 128

Gleanings

What have you learned? How do you feel in general and about what you have discussed? What are some of the insights that you will be taking home from this discussion?



Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
Stephen Broadbent, Sculptor
Chester Cathedral, England

Closing Prayer

One: May the Lord bless what we have shared this day to our enlightenment and growth.

All: May the Lord grant our hearts’ desires for those we love, the human family and the whole of Creation.

One: We pray for

(The prayer continues with members sharing a concern or name. After each concern is expressed, the group responds with ...)

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

(After all the prayers have been shared, the leader closes with ...)

One: Lord, hear our prayers, keep our desire for wisdom alive, help us to listen, act and grow, that all our days would be blessed with shalom—wholeness and peace.

All: Amen.

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Next Week: Chapters 7&9

In his short article, “Paying Homage: Being Christian in a World of Many Faiths”, Bruce Sanguin takes Fox’s notion of post-denominationalism and wonders about Christianity as a faith among faiths. Bill Phipps is probably best known as a United Church of Canada Moderator and for his affirmation of some controversial beliefs in the Canadian Media. Currently a minister at a charge in Calgary, in “Social Justice and a Spirituality of Transformation” he reflects on transformation, action and the common good.