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Sacred Worth Study
Why are we here?
7-4-2021

Ground Rules

We've got a lot of people here and a precious hour of time to have a conversation, so I want to go over a few ground rules to make this as productive and holy of space for everyone here. So I hope that we can hold the principles of Confidentiality, understanding, and respect

1st. Confidentiality. The problem with difficult issues, the first thing to go is our ability to hear the other person. So we misunderstand something, tell someone else and the rumor mill turns a simple misunderstanding into a big conflict. So I hope we can all commit to confidentiality, if you speak about what happens in this classroom, please do not say who said it or what service they attend.

2nd, Understanding. Saint Francis once said, make me an instrument of your peace, so that I might seek to understand before seeking to be understood. When we have a disagreement when someone says something inflammatory, repeat back to them what you thought they said. "Correct me if I'm wrong, I heard that you say was."

3rd Respect. We. ALL OF US. are beloved children of God. I don't care what you believe, what you've done. I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow. Not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. So I expect that we will treat each other with that love. No one is beyond redemption. And everyone here is a human being. I will not tolerate anyone dehumanizing another. If we devolve into calling each other sinners or each other's family members sinners then we will never be able to have a productive conversation.

(Allow for conversation until 11:10)

Does anyone have any problems or clarifications with any of these?

Would you like to add any more ground rules?

Wisdom

I also have some wisdom that I have gotten from others who have gone through this sort of process.

This sort of conversion demands vulnerability. We cannot get stuck with talking about issues. We must share our fears and our foundational human needs. Needs like:

Belonging: They aren't letting me play

Meaning: Why?

Recognition: His piece is bigger than mine

Security: Hold me

Self-determination: I can do this myself

We cannot get bogged down with inaccurate stereotypes. Lesbian and gay adults have been proven to be fit parents. There is no scientific evidence that gay people are any more likely to be pedophiles. Sexual orientation has a genetic component and is determined before birth. There is no scientific evidence that lgbt people can change their orientation by their own will or conversion therapy.

This should not be an adversarial discussion. I'll talk about this more next week, but this kind of discussion can be harmful when we ask LGBT people to defend their existence. Can a Jew or African American defend themselves against a white supremest? Instead, I hope that we can talk about how we are going to do church together and how the church is negatively implicated in hurting LGBT people. Let us begin from a place of grace and anticipation for what God can do and is doing among us.

(Allow for conversation until 11:25)

What are your fears heading into this conversation?

When have people made assumptions about you?

When you experienced or witnessed times when people have dehumanized you or someone you love?

Why are we here?

While we will talk about history next Sunday, about the years that Joleen and others have been talking about this issue and the decades that Mennonites have been discussing this. I want to start with why are we here.

The short answer is that we are here because a large enough part of the congregation is clamoring for the conversation and both services of the congregation are amiable to this conversation. I know that not everyone wants to talk about this, I have listened to you and am in the process of understanding where they are coming from.

It is important that while I have proposed a number of solutions, becoming a welcoming and affirming congregation, forbearance, or any other solution. These are just ideas, it is up to all of you here where this conversation goes. I am just a resource, a biblical scholar. Right now we are here to process with one another and this will be worth it even if we cannot agree to disagree on this issue. I will guide you through a process, but you will decide together how to be church together.

The long answer is that we have a biblical imperative. Jeremiah shouted at his religious leaders, They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people lightly and neglectfully, saying peace, peace, when there is no peace. The wound of not talking about LGBT people is deep and festering. And if we do not talk about this openly and honestly, then it will continue to build up resentment in our church.

I know that the Mennonite path through conflict is to avoid it. To maintain peace and unity at all costs. But when we read Paul, he does not dodge around tough issues. When the church was threatening to break apart over the issue of circumcision, Paul went straight at the issue, taking the side of gentiles who thought that they did not have to be Jews in order to be Christians. Later when gentiles and Jews argued about food laws, Paul refused to take a side, arguing that both sides should follow the conscience of their own

minds and practice their own beliefs because we are accountable to God and not each other.

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman by the well, and they discussed where it was best to worship God. Jesus said that his fellow Jews one day would not worship at the temple and that the Samaritans would not worship in their high places. Instead, they would each worship in Spirit and Truth.

Questions about circumcision, kosher, and where to worship are far more central and immovable than the issue we're going to discuss these next two months. But the people of God and Jesus have endeavored to stay one people AND find a way through these sorts of conflicts. These next few months we join with Jesus and Paul as we try to figure out what the Bible says to us and where the Holy Spirit is leading us. I am sure that we will not all agree. But I hope that by reaching into this deep wound. We can understand each other better and therefore increase the quality of our differences.

(Discuss till 11:40 or end)

When have you experienced a misunderstanding that has led to conflict?

Have you ever stewed in a conflict for years, not talking about something that was bothering you that someone else said?

(yes or no, invite people to resolve this conflict outside of class)

What are the most important parts of Christianity to you?

(Name when the church has fought over this issue in the past)