

FCCS April 7, 2019  
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## “Pressing Onward”

We’re gonna keep on moving forward...

Change is hard! We want to believe we are good at it, but for most part change is hard. Organisms, like people, tend to prefer homeostasis. It usually takes something pretty extraordinary to force us to change. People who study these things call it “the boiling point”. Things have to get really bad, before we are willing to do something different.

Jesus’ public ministry happened at such a boiling point, the Roman Empire had created a huge divide between rich and poor, powerful and marginalized. The underclass was no longer seen nor safe, not even in the temple- for Jesus of Nazareth- that meant that something had to be done.

A devout Jew, Jesus believed that if the temple culture could change- at least life for the Jewish people would improve. He never set out to change the Roman Empire. He certainly never set out to start a new religion, he wanted to see God’s faithful people live into a new vision. A world beyond the world as it was and more like the world as it should be; just and equitable for everyone.

Christians refer to Jesus’ vision as the Kingdom of God on earth. It is a vision that takes the heavenly realm and brings it down to meet us where and how we live- in the here and now.

It was Jesus’ understanding of the Hebrew teachings that compelled him to live into the mandate of Isaiah, “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43)

For some struggling people and those who became his disciples, Jesus’ ministry was the **way** in the wilderness, his ministry a **path** in the dessert. It was a prophet vision, a difficult vision. Jesus’ vision required change and change as we know is HARD!

- Remember when they banned cigarettes from bars in New York. The restaurant owners were certain that disaster was imminent.
- Remember when seat belts were first required in cars...
- Or when the building codes began to require fire exits and accessibility ramps? (Based on a web post by Seth Godin)

Change is... HARD.

You know why, because we see things as we have known them. We see things through our particular lenses and it's hard to imagine what we cannot know, and yet that is exactly what our faith and our progressing culture demands we do.

It's hard, and necessary to **must imagine what we cannot yet see; a more just and equitable world.**

This past Friday I was a part of a required boundary training for clergy, the Rev's Todd Evans and Bill Hutchinson also attended. In fact a hundred and ten of us attended the training, together we fumbled our way through conversations about appropriate use of power; we talked in small groups and shared our stories of failure and growth.

This six-hour training, plus an online mandated reporter course are regulated requirements for all clergy (active or retired) in order to maintain ordination standing in the United Church of Christ.

What is striking to me, is that boundary awareness is a relatively new development in any profession. In 1977, Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune founded the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, now known as FaithTrust Institute. Today FaithTrust Institute is a multifaith, multicultural organization addressing the faith aspects of abuse.

Imagine how things might have been different if an organization like this had existed sooner, but also, imagine what difficulties Fortune faced in introducing this work into a culture that had never experienced it before.

Change is... HARD.

One of the questions we, at the boundary workshop, were asked to answer was if we were able to tell whether or not our actions made someone uncomfortable. It was a yes or no question.

How would you have answered? Raise your hand if you would have answered “yes”, I know when my actions make others uncomfortable.

How about no?

I think most of the people in that room, myself included answered “yes”.

People in ministry tend to think we understand the role and are able to appropriately read a situation. But the reality is, we can never fully know what is going on for someone else can we? Faces may say one thing, while brains are saying something totally different. We do not all experience comfort or discomfort the same way, right?

Once again, I along with many others in that room, had to take a deeper dive into self-awareness and examine the lenses through which we perceive the world. Change is...HARD. It is necessary and it is hard.

What's worse is that there is no guarantee that the people around us will engage in this difficult and endless work. We see evidence every day of people's refusal to own their power take responsibility for their privilege, but for followers of Jesus- this is the work. We have to keep growing.

The call to discipleship is a call to awareness. Jesus implores us to continue to grow and deepen in our understanding of those around us and with whom we are co-creating this beautiful vision of the world as it can be, the Kingdom of God on earth.

George Bernard Shaw said it best, “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

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