

THE FOUNDATIONS OF LIBERAL THEOLOGY SERMON SERIES

A series of sermons preached at
Plymouth Congregational Church
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THE FOUNDATIONS OF LIBERAL THEOLOGY: The Courage of Universalism

October 4, 1998 (World Communion)

Text: Luke 14:15-24

Ernst Kasemann, the German theologian, recounted the following story that happened when a series of terrible storms and floods hit Holland in 1952. The scene was a small town where strict religious observance was still the norm and where adherence to God's commandments was the highest value. It was a Sunday, and one of the worst storms was passing through, and the wind and the waves were so strong that one of the dykes protecting the village was in danger of collapsing. Immediate work would have to be done to avoid a disaster, and the police urged the local pastor to mobilize his congregation to help. But it was a Sunday, you see... the Sabbath... when no work was supposed to be done. What could the minister do? Call the people to work, even if it meant profaning the Sabbath? Or let them be destroyed in order to honor the commandment? Finally, he felt that he couldn't bear the decision alone, so he called an emergency meeting of the church council. The direction of the discussion was clear: God's will is what is most important. If God wants to, he can always perform a miracle with the wind and the waves. Therefore, the Christian's duty is obedience to the commandments, even if it means death. The dyke would not be rebuilt, not on a Sunday. At this point, the pastor tried one more argument, maybe even against his own conviction. Didn't Jesus himself occasionally break the commandment about the Sabbath, and didn't he say that the Sabbath was made for humankind, and not the other way around? At which point an older member of the council stood up: "I've always been troubled, pastor, by something I've never said publicly. Now I have to say it. I have always had the suspicion that our Lord Jesus was just a bit of a liberal."

When the Strategic Plan of this church was adopted earlier in the decade, the first goal listed in that excellent document was this: "To enlarge, deepen, and exemplify our commitment to *liberal theology*." And when Plymouth was looking for a new Senior Minister in 1995, the search committee ran a large ad in *The Christian Century*, the first line of which read: "We are an independent-thinking, *theologically liberal*, 1900 member, urban congregation." Now, these are not the 1960's. The "l-word" is not nearly as fashionable today as it was then, either in politics or in theology. So, why would a church make such a claim? What is the "theological liberalism" that is such an important part of Plymouth's identity?

Over three Sundays this month, and perhaps in subsequent sermons through the year, I would like to touch on and explore some of the “foundations” of liberal theology – not so much in an academic sense, but as it has been lived out here at Plymouth over the last half-century. As I’ve begun to prepare these sermons, I’ve realized that they’re not so easily divided into discreet segments, but with the understanding ahead of time that there may be some overlapping and some recurrent themes, the plan is this: today I will speak about the concept of universalism. Next week, I will touch on the authority of the individual conscience. And two weeks after that – skipping over Children’s Sabbath – I want to think with you about humility as a central characteristic of liberal theology. As I said, three sermons won’t exhaust the issues inherent in liberalism, and we may return to this series after the first of the year. (On the other hand if, this month, attendance drops to under one hundred, I’ll get the message.)

One other thing. Let’s acknowledge the inherent paradox in Plymouth’s description of itself as theologically liberal. On the one hand, that would seem to be a limiting statement, insofar as any act of definition implies some limits. And yet, the whole point of this definition is to say that we want to be *less* limited. In other words, the paradox goes this way: Plymouth’s orthodoxy is that there is no orthodoxy here. Plymouth’s corporate “creed” is that there shall be no corporate creed. So, as I describe the universalism that I understand to be present here at Plymouth, I do so knowing that no statement can speak for everyone here, and that some of you might take exception to some of these views. That’s all to the good, and if a lively discussion on these issues is the result of this sermon, I will be well rewarded. (By the way, it is a privilege to note that Dr. Conn is with us this morning, and I want to acknowledge with gratitude and humility that it is he who was the creative spirit behind Plymouth’s universalism.)

Universalism. It begins with a child’s question in a Sunday School class. “I have a friend at school,” the boy says. “Her name is Chava. She goes to Temple Israel. Will she get to heaven?” Somewhere he got the idea that God makes choices about people when they die and that some go to heaven and some do not. Maybe he was taught that. Maybe he got it by osmosis from a general cultural repository of ideas. More classically put, it is a question about redemption. In the end of the day, does God redeem all of creation, or only a part of it? Or, to put it in the context of the passage we read from Luke: will those who choose not to come to the banquet when invited the first time receive subsequent invitations? Will God, in fact, rest until every soul has been gathered in? The universalist response, considered heretical through much of Christian history, is that nothing falls beyond the redeeming power of the Creator’s love. Believer and non-believer, the Jew, the Buddhist, the Christian, the saint and the mass-murderer... all are eventually redeemed. None are left out or excluded. Origen of Alexandria, in the third century, was one of the first to put forth this idea, and there is a thread of it all through Christian history, but it wasn’t until after the Enlightenment, not really until the eighteenth century, that Universalism appears as a full-blown movement. Those of us who are universalists, insofar as we think about such things, cannot imagine a God who would turn any human soul – any creature, for that matter – away from the heavenly banquet. Salvation is universal.

But here at Plymouth, the universalist focus has been less on questions about the afterlife and salvation and more on the ways of enlightenment or revelation, and, correlatively, about the relationship between the various world religions. How do we know God? How do we understand the divine? Is Christianity the only way? Or is it the “best” way? Universalism’s response is that there are many paths to God, not just one... many revelations of God, not just one. As it says in the Rig Veda (from Hindu tradition): “Truth is one; the wise call it by many names.”

But it is wise, too, not to oversimplify. Sometimes people say, “Aren’t all the religions basically the same? Aren’t they all about love and the Golden Rule?” And there is a kernel of truth there, but only a thoroughgoing reductionism can lead to the notion that all religions are the same. The Christian view of reality and the Buddhist view of reality are hugely different. The Hindu vision

of God is vastly different from the Jewish vision. If you would like to read a wonderful description of these differences by someone who has great respect for all of the traditions, pick up Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras, by Diana Eck, who is at Harvard. I agree with her assessment and believe that to say that the various traditions are basically the same is really to trivialize them and to diminish the weight of each of them and all of them.

But even if they are not all the same, aren't all the world's faiths equally viable and equally valuable? Well, it depends on what you include when you say the "world's faiths." Surely the religion of David Koresh (who led the Branch Davidians to their death in Waco) cannot be put on the same plane as that of the Dalai Lama. Surely you would not compare the religion of Jim Jones, whose followers committed mass suicide, with that of Mahatma Ghandi. Surely the racist Christianity of Nazism cannot command equal respect with the healing Christianity of Mother Theresa. To say that all religions are equally viable stretches credulity. There has to be some discernment, some discrimination. That is why Jesus said that religious leaders and the religious ideas should be judged by the fruit they bear. The bitter fruit of a Jim Jones deserves to be cast on the trash heap of history, while the sweet fruit of a Mother Theresa or the Dalai Lama deserve to be savored and shared.

The fact is, there are a number of historic faiths which have produced good, nourishing, sweet fruit. Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Taosim, Confucianism, Baha'i, and Unitarianism are among these. There are excesses in each which are bitter, from the Moslem terrorist who bombs a busload of civilians to the Christian terrorist who bombs an abortion clinic. But at their best, each has produced good fruit, made human life more livable, helped us glimpse beyond human life to the Eternal. As we said, the fruits are different, but is it necessary to say that one is sweeter than the others? Can it be said that God is revealed more fully in one than in the others? What is it in us that needs to see things hierarchically like that? What is it in us that needs to keep God circumscribed by our own language, our own rituals, our own beliefs? The God who has been proclaimed from this pulpit for nearly fifty years is one who is bigger than any one religion, not able to be contained by one set of images or one particular language. As Paul Tillich wrote, "The message of Christianity is not Christianity, but a new creation." The view that Christianity is closer to truth than the other traditions is one that has not found a home here at Plymouth. Nor is the idea of Christianity as *primus inter pares*, the "first among equals" one that seems to win much allegiance.

Then, what? Is our Christianity of no consequence? Should we just become spiritual dabblers, taking a little of this faith and a little of that? Well, more on that question next week. But for now, let us say this: while we do not hold that the Christian tradition is "better" than any other tradition, most of us still claim it as "our" tradition. The Christian "story," with all of its images and symbols and rituals is our home. Into it, we welcome with joy and respect and affection the symbols and stories and people of other traditions. And from it, we venture out to visit the "home" ideas of their faith. We want our children to know as many of them as they can. We rejoice both in the points of continuity that connect us with other faiths and in the special elements that makes each unique. But just as one who is multi-lingual will always have a native language, so most of us, in our learning the ideas and practices of other religions, still draw most regularly from the Christian well.

Through it all, the universalist spirit pervades this place and draws us all to this table. It is not a table for the few, but for everyone. It is not a table for the righteous, but for everyone. It is not a table for Christians alone, but for everyone. To be sure, in inviting others to the table it is not our intention to demean their traditions or to dilute our own but to see the table as a meeting place that transcends all of our differences. For us, the table is not an ultimately sectarian symbol, but a universal one, reminding us that behind and above everything, behind and above all the different rituals, all the different beliefs, all the different languages, all the different understandings, there is God, the one, true God, nameless and named by a thousand names, the one true God who alone deserves our worship, our love, and our praise. Amen.



**THE FOUNDATIONS OF LIBERAL THEOLOGY:
The Authority of the Individual Conscience**

October 11, 1998

Text: Romans 14:1-9

This is the second in a series of sermons entitled: “The Foundations of Liberal Theology.” It’s wonderful how these things get put into perspective. Yesterday’s mail brought with it the most recent issue of *The Christian Century*, carrying a cover article entitled: “The Making of a Post-Liberal,” which contends that liberal theology has had its day. As if that were not enough, I noted that the article was written by a minister a few years my junior who was once in a high school fellowship group that I led. He is also a cherished friend, and I can’t wait to talk with him about it and to explain, as patiently as I can, where he has gone wrong. At any rate, let me remind you that last week’s theme was “Universalism,” and we spoke about our Christian tradition as being one of many equally viable pathways to God. Today, we look at another hallmark of liberal theology, namely: “The Authority of the Individual Conscience.” Shall we pray:

Speak to us, God, in that fiery inner place where the soul’s eye, and the heart’s ear, and the mind’s hand come together on holy ground. Amen.

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One of the primary theological issues is the question of authority. Who or what determines what is normative for our faith? To vastly oversimplify the options, take this historical overview. Through the Middle Ages the answer was: “The church determines. I believe thus-and-so because that is what the church, or the tradition, teaches.” The authority ultimately lay in the teachings of the bishops, and finally in the words of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. In the early phases of the Protestant Reformation, the rallying cry was “*Sola Scriptura*,” which means, “by scripture alone.” That is, scripture is the final word on what we shall believe. The authority is in the book. If it’s in the Bible, that settles it. And in the later, more radical phases of the Reformation, from which roots this church has grown, authority was seen to reside in the depths of the individual conscience, the individual experience, the individual understanding. No more will the church tell us what we are to believe. No more are we bound by a particular canon of scripture, or by a particular understanding of that canon. It is our individual experience of God that is normative... and formative of what we will believe.

Now, as I’ve said, that is a greatly simplified analysis. All three sources of authority – church tradition, scripture, and the individual conscience or experience – are evident in nearly every tradition. It is a matter of weight, of relative importance. Roman Catholics, heirs to the medieval understanding, acknowledge a role for the individual experience, the individual apprehension of God. Lutherans, children of the early Reformation, still acknowledge that some authority resides in church teaching. And Congregationalists and other radicals, still will look to scripture for guidance in various ways.

But the broad-stroke descriptions still have some validity, and I think it fair to say that if you delve to the very soul of Plymouth Congregational Church, stripping away all that is extraneous and penultimate, what you will find is this: a widely and deeply held belief, firm and unwavering, that in matters of faith, the final authority must reside in the individual conscience. No creed – and certainly no preacher – can speak *for* us all, though it may be said that sometimes the creeds – and occasionally the preacher – speak with profit *to* our need, *to* our understanding, *to* our experience. When we sing “Blest Be the Tie that Binds,” we recognize that the tie which holds us together is not

a common statement of faith, not a systematic theology, not a creed... but a covenant, an agreement, a compact. It is not a common belief, but a common purpose that makes us one.

Now, many people mistakenly believe that the notion of the authority of the individual conscience is a kind of democratic ideal, something akin to our understanding of the right of privacy. Most bluntly stated, it comes out like this: "What I believe is my own personal business, and no one else's." In fact, though, the roots of this idea are in our understanding of the nature of God rather than the rights of human beings. The radical reformers believed that God is such that any human being can apprehend God directly, without the mediation either of church or even of scripture. God can be experienced personally, heard personally, known personally, understood personally. It is this understanding of the nature of God that gives rise to a belief about individual human rights and not the other way around. God is not apprehended personally because we have the right to personal beliefs. We have the right to personal beliefs because people before us understood that God is apprehended personally and they extrapolated that understanding into a model of society that was built on that vision of God.

So, thanks be to God... and to some of our predecessors in this place... Plymouth is a place where we celebrate the presence of the divine to and in each individual... and where we uphold the freedom of each individual to understand and speak of that presence in a particular way. In this, we remember Jesus, who asked his disciples at one point: "Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?" And Paul, who said of varied practices in the early church: "Let all be fully convinced in their own minds."

All that having been said, may I offer a couple of loving cautions to this remarkable congregation where the authority of the individual conscience is so highly regarded? (My preaching teacher would have made me put that another way. "Are you really asking their permission," he would demand, "or are you going to do it anyway?" I'm going to do it anyway. Here, then, are some cautions.)

First of all, the authority of the individual conscience, put together with a shrinking globe and a more pluralistic society, has given rise to what has been alternately called: "designer religion," or "pastiche religion" or "cafeteria-style religion." As the question was put on the cover of a recent issue of the *Utne Reader*: "In a mix-and-match world, why not create your own religion?" So, for example, I might want to take the idea of grace from Christianity, a belief in re-incarnation from Hinduism, an ethic of justice from Judaism, and a practice of meditation from Buddhism. As I would in a cafeteria line, I make my meal up as I go along. Our discussion of universalism last week suggested that there is gold to be mined from each of the world's great religious traditions.

But it isn't quite that simple. No one, of course, questions your *right* to "create your own religion." But one might question the *wisdom* of it if it is just a "cafeteria" approach. You see, each of the great religious traditions has its own integrity, its own cohesiveness, its own organic nature. One cannot lightly tinker with these things. True, you might take a leaf from one tree and graft it onto a branch from another. You might take a pig's heart and transplant it into a human. Some forms of syncretism can work and can enhance our faith. But it is a much more delicate operation, and one much more susceptible to rejection or failure than the simple mechanical act of picking a bunch of different flowers and putting them together in a bouquet, or taking a Chevy engine and putting it into a Ford body. And as any decent flower arranger will tell you, even creating a bouquet demands some knowledge of what things go together and what things do not. This is not to say that we should not drink happily from wells other than our own, learn joyfully from other religions than our own. Only that it must be done carefully. As Huston Smith, the scholar of comparative religion, says: "...what I call the cafeteria approach to spirituality, is not the way organisms are put together, nor great works of art. And a vital faith is more like an organism or a work of art than it is like a cafeteria tray." Elements of various faiths can come together, can inform one another in wonderful ways, but it takes long study, sensitivity, respect for the integrity of each tradition, and an

understanding of the risks involved. It's simply not as easy as taking "one from column A and two from column B."

Which brings me to the other caution. The authority of the individual conscience has its greatest power when it is exercised in community, not in isolation. The idea that one's religion is a "personal" matter, a "private" affair, and "no one else's business," is sad at best... and dangerous at worst. When you are going way out on theological branches, which is where many theological liberals happily find themselves, it is important to have others around who can shout encouragement from the ground, or give guidance from somewhere else on the tree, or, in the end of the day, who can help you pick yourself up and dust yourself off should you fall. Doing theology, developing a belief system, living a faith – these are not solitary matters. They are meant to be done in community. And the authority of the individual conscience should not be seen as a license to lazy or unchallenged thinking but rather an invitation to the rigor of interpreting and sharing our faith journeys with one another. Sylvia Boorstein, the founding teacher of the Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California, says: "The pitfall of inventing your own [spiritual] practice... is that you have no way of judging spiritual progress if you're completely alone. There's no substantial group of other people to keep tabs on you. When you work within a community, you support each other and people point out when you might be deluding yourself. A crucial aspect of religion is that it makes us relate to other people in a meaningful and sacred way." Our task, then, at Plymouth, as we celebrate the authority of the individual conscience, is to provide more and more forums and opportunities for the sharing and the testing of our beliefs, places where we can help one another develop as spiritual persons and where we can live out the meaning of our covenant:

"We covenant with you, O God, and one with another, and do bind ourselves in your presence to walk together in all your ways, according as you are pleased to reveal yourself to us in your blessed word of truth."

In two weeks, we'll pick up this series again, touching on something that is not so much a tenet of liberal theology but a central characteristic of it: namely, a sense of humility. In the meantime, not that you here at Plymouth need much encouragement on this: keep thinking for yourselves. Seek God in the ways that seem right to you. And this, too: honor the integrity of the traditions, and in whatever ways you can, give guidance to one another on the paths of the spirit. Amen.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF LIBERAL THEOLOGY: The Power of Humility

October 25, 1998

Text: Proverbs 15:30-33

The year was 1650. The English Civil War had just ended with the victory of the parliamentary forces over those of the King, Charles I. The King himself had been executed, but Parliament was not ready to rule in any consistent way. So it was that Oliver Cromwell, who had led the parliamentary armies, found himself holding what he had not sought: political leadership over all of the British Isles. Scotland, however, had refused to recognize the English republic and had named Charles II as king. Cromwell, in the midst of a military campaign to bring the recalcitrants into the republic, wrote a letter to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The particular issues he was addressing are hardly relevant here, but from that letter comes a sentence, impassioned and clear, that speaks for every person who has ever encountered someone with an intractably closed mind. "I beseech you," Cromwell wrote, "in the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken."

The ability to think that one may be mistaken is a *sine qua non* of a civilized human being. Every true interchange of ideas demands that there be, in the mind of each participant in the discussion, at least a germ of the notion: “I may be wrong about this.” There may not be much of it. It may, as I say, be only a germ. But as long as that possibility – distant as it may seem – is still entertained (“I just might be wrong.”), real conversation can take place. As soon, however, as any participant crosses over the line into absolute certainty, the colloquy, for all practical purposes, is ended, and, if I may be permitted an apocalyptic image, real civilization becomes impossible. I would venture a guess, for instance, that at the moment he pulled the trigger yesterday, the sniper who killed the abortion doctor in New York had a sense of absolute certainty about his cause, certainty untempered by humility and which made him incapable of thinking that he might be mistaken. Too much of that kind of certainty will doom our world.

In that trove of prudential wisdom that is the Book of Proverbs, there is this gem:

Those who ignore instruction despise themselves,

But those who heed admonition gain understanding. (Pr. 15:32)

Our topic today is humility, and this is the third in a series of sermons about “The Foundations of Liberal Theology.” Here, as if on cue, I can hear some of my evangelical friends complaining, “Oh, so now you think that liberals have a monopoly on humility! What an amazingly un-humble idea!” And, of course, the complaint is well-founded. The easiest thing in the world for me to do – especially from this pulpit and in this congregation – would be to set up some fundamentalist or evangelical straw-man and then knock him down. You know the character. She’s the one with the bumper sticker that proclaims: “God says it; I believe it; and that settles it.” He’s the one who uses the word “Christian” as an adjective that describes the “good” people as over and against everyone else. They are the ones who say that they’re “praying” for you, but who say it with such a fine air of condescension that you feel as though you have just been put in short pants and patted on the head. What a time we could have railing against those characters for twenty minutes! How easy to raise a polemic against fundamentalism... especially because, as I believe, fundamentalisms constitute one of the greatest threats to our world culture. But it just isn’t that simple. Because if you are talking about humility as a personality trait, I know plenty of conservatives who are wonderfully humble and plenty of liberals who are maddeningly arrogant. And the same is true if we are talking in political categories. Neither liberals nor conservatives corner the market on humility; it is a characteristic that transcends categories of opinion or political leaning.

But I want to make the claim that there is, in the structure of liberal theology itself, a bias toward humility that may not be found elsewhere. Again, I’m not saying that humility is always exhibited in the attitudes and actions of those who claim to be liberal theologically, but that is because we are not practicing what we preach. I’m only saying that theological liberalism, in its very nature, has a non-absolutist, non-triumphal, pluralist view of reality and that such a view tends toward humility because it is always questioning itself and is always honestly in conversation with other views. I want to suggest that *believing with humility, having conviction without having certainty*, leads to a richer life of faith than is possible in any other way. This humility, through which we see ourselves as being smaller than the whole, leaves room for certain other realities that deepen our experience of the divine.

First of all, if we believe with humility, we leave room for doubt. Doubt is the salt that gives faith its flavor. One night you stand under a clear October sky, a sky carbonated with stars. The night before, perhaps, that same sky spoke to you of God’s grandeur and you felt safe, comforted. But tonight (was it something you heard on the evening news, or the sight of a familiar name on the obituary page, or just an old, persistent, inner nagging?) – tonight, it is the cold, empty, obsidian of space and not the warm twinkling of the stars that makes you think. Now God seems achingly distant, unreachable. It’s not so much that you doubt God, but that you doubt everything you thought you knew about God. Without this experience of doubt, faith hardens into certainty and becomes

inert, dead. Add the catalyst of doubt back into the mix, though, and faith begins to change, transform itself, grow. As Graham Greene said, “When we are not sure, we are alive.”

Then, too, when we believe with humility, we leave room for ambiguity and paradox. Once again, certainty is the enemy. Certainty wants blacks and whites, rights and wrongs. It cannot abide gray areas, either in theological discourse or in ethical decision-making. Certainty wants to be able to say that this is sacred and that is secular. and it cannot abide the paradox of the two dwelling in each other. Humility softens our certainties and invites us into realms of thought and choice where things are never quite as clear as we would like them to be and where a rigorous and sensitive process of weighing and valuing and deciding is required of us. The awful choices, for instance, around questions like euthanasia and genetic engineering, the difficult problems of individual rights in the context of community cohesion, the imponderable notions of incarnation, redemption, resurrection, grace and law – these simply cannot be approached with absolute certainty by anyone still capable of real thought. Ambiguity infuses our lives, and in the theological realm, humility confesses and accepts the ambiguity rather than repressing and denying it. As Kierkegaard said: “The paradox is the source of the thinker’s passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling – a paltry mediocrity.”

Third, believing with humility leaves room for the beliefs and opinions and thoughts of other people. I touched on this three weeks ago when I spoke about universalism, and again the following week when we dealt with the authority of the individual conscience. We all celebrate the fact that one of Plymouth’s central ideas, the root of its genius, is the notion that all shades of opinion and thought are welcome here. But it is also here, dear Plymouthites, that we need humbly to question ourselves from time to time. The openness we celebrate and claim can atrophy and shrivel if it is not exercised and evaluated from time to time. Our conversation with people of other faiths, with seekers and skeptics, is well attested. But, to be honest, we may have to ask whether we are equally willing to cultivate a conversation with Christian orthodoxy. I say this with a bit of fear and trembling, but I am compelled to it anyway: the paradox of liberalism is that it leaves doors open on the left *and* on the right. This may be doubly difficult because in some cases, the favor is not returned by our more evangelical brothers and sisters.

Finally, believing with humility leaves room for God. The more certainly we think we know what God is like and what God does and what God wills, the less room we leave for God to be God. One attribute of God is that she is endlessly surprising. The depth of God’s love is surprising because it goes deeper than we imagine, even for people we believe to be undeserving of that love. The breadth of God’s presence is surprising because every time we build a church to hold God in, God breaks out and springs up in the coffee shop across the street, or in a high-rise boardroom downtown, in a housing project where a sprig of pride breaks through the concrete of economic deprivation. The height of God’s reality is surprising because even as we construct towers of philosophical speculation God soars above them and shows them to be no more effective in reaching the divine than a man jumping to reach the moon. Humility, by releasing us from the prisons of our certainties, allows us the enjoyment of wonder and awe and the incredible relief of *not* being in charge.

So, the power of humility. It makes room in us for doubt, for paradox, for the ideas of others, and for God. I believe that the church needs less certainty and more conviction. It needs to promulgate fewer rigid theological statements and tell more paradoxical stories about faith. The church needs to embrace ambiguity and eschew the notion that there is an absolutely true answer for every question. The church needs to be less concerned with establishing its truth as over and against other truths and be more involved in the conversation of truths that brings the world together. Some say that this lack of clarity, this moving away from definition, this acceptance of relativity will weaken the church’s mission and hasten it’s demise. I don’t think that’s true. But... of course... I could be wrong!

Amen.