

Heretics - September 21, 2017

The Emerging Christian Way - Chapter 8 "Radical Inclusion" by Anne Squire

Introduction:

"Radical Inclusion" is the practice of including, in any community, those who are normally excluded. For Christian communities, Jesus is the model of someone who lived and taught "radical inclusion". Page 143

What did Jesus mean when he talked of the kingdom of God?

Differences between 'the kingdom of God' and the kingdom of this world.

Attempts to rename to 'kin-dom', 'realm', 'basileia'

Stories and parables of Jesus condemn the practice of dividing people into "insiders" and "outsiders".

Jesus practiced an "open table" drinking and eating with those who were considered outsiders.

"No one has the right to limit God's choice of who can inhabit the kingdom"

"The arc of the gospel is always bent toward radical inclusion." (Walter Brueggemann)

"Radical inclusion - as radical as Jesus and as inclusive as God's love." p. 152

"The kingdom way is not a reduced version of faith but a fulfillment of the dream of Jesus, for life in the kingdom now." (A. Squire) p. 153

Part 2

The Practice of Radical Inclusion Written by Anne Squire, pages 147-151

"What exclusive practices need to be challenged today and who is being affected or hurt by their continued existence?"

The poor

This exclusion stems from an unfair distribution of resources, an economic system that favors the rich, and a social system that stigmatizes the homeless and the destitute. What is needed is a political will to make the changes necessary.

Women

Some denominations do not include women in the ministerial leadership of the church; others refuse to accept ordained women and even fail to include the women in the decision-making processes of the church. The rationale these latter churches often offer is that Jesus was a man and chose only male disciples; they forget the important role women played in the ministry of Jesus and in the early church. Feminists have accomplished much in terms of opening doors that have traditionally been closed to women, but this is still a patriarchal culture.

Children and Youth

In speaking about children, Jesus made a point of saying that “of such is the kingdom of Heaven.” Children and youth are not the church of the future; they are part of the church today and their opinions matter. The educational resources used by the church need to reflect their questions and concerns.

Gays and Lesbians

The current debate over the role of gays, lesbians bisexual, and transgendered people in both church and society illustrates one of the deepest and most hurtful exclusions in our society. Even though more and more people are becoming more inclusive in their outlook once they come to know people whose sexual orientation is different from their own, we still have a long way to go to make genuine acceptance the rule and not the exception.

People of Different Races

Canada prides itself on being a tolerant society that affirms diversity. Yet racial intolerance is a part of too many neighbourhoods. People are still classified by the colour of their skin, by their accents and by their dress. Fortunately the younger generation seems to be more accepting than the older one.

First Nations People

First Nations people have a long history of being excluded from Canadian and American society. In a naïve and misguided effort to help the aboriginal peoples become part of a newly developing society, governments and churches succeeded only in robbing them of their lands, their culture, their language, and their birthright. Even their children were lost to them when many were taken from their villages and placed in residential schools where they were not allowed to speak their own language.

People who are challenged physically, mentally and emotionally

Although many congregations are making an effort to make their church buildings physically accessible to all, few are giving much thought to including those who are mentally or psychologically challenged. Openness to these kinds of differences will still require much practice, patience, and persistence.

Saints and Sinners

While Jesus said he came not to welcome the righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance, the church took it upon itself to decide which was which. Saints were only those named to certain branches of the church. For “sinners”, rituals of confession, repentance, and rehabilitation became barriers instead of open doors. Many of these concepts and rituals are challenged by the concept of radical inclusion. Especially challenged is the teaching that God’s forgiveness can only come when a sacrifice has been made and the supreme sacrifice was the death of Jesus on the cross. Understanding that there are no such limits to God’s forgiveness means that both saints and sinners are welcomed into the kingdom.

Christians in exile

A church which is radically inclusive will welcome those who are now living “in exile” from the church. People may be staying away because they have not felt welcome. Others may exile themselves because they can no longer believe what the church has taught for centuries. Every congregation needs a safe place where people who might be labeled “heretics” can say what they really believe, and still be part of the community.

Spiritual Seekers

Many who can no longer accept the theology being preached in our churches still experience a spiritual longing for something they know they need. There is, among countless individuals on the fringes of the church, an ongoing search for a new spirituality that answers their need to understand the meaning and purpose of life. Those who seek and question should be welcome in the kingdom.

All strands of ministry

A radical inclusion of all strands of ministry would mean that lay pastoral ministers, staff associates, and diaconal ministers would be more fully accepted and that ordained ministers would not be threatened by them. The ministry of the whole people is too important to allow ourselves to get caught up in controversy about status and privilege.

Nature and Environment

The kingdom of God is more than a “people place”. It is a realm where the earth is more than “landscape”. As Anne Primavesi reminds us, the earth itself is alive; rather than just hosting life, it is a dynamic, self organizing system. As part of a larger system which existed without humans for millions of years, we need the earth more than it needs us. This realization changes our understanding of ourselves and relationship to the environment. No longer can we claim to be the center and the caretakers of the earth. Instead we see ourselves as recipients of the gifts of the earth—gifts without which we could not exist. Radical inclusion includes the earth itself.

Science and Technology

The kingdom of God has room for scientific discoveries. We live with a very different perspective of the universe than people had in Jesus' day. We have outgrown the three-tiered universe of the gospels. Galileo changed forever the concept that humans are the center and focus of creation. Ever since then we have been trying to find the right relationship between planet earth and the kingdom of God. Science and technology are gifts from God to be used for the benefit of all people.

Tradition and Change

Theology of the kingdom has a place for tradition, but there is a need to distinguish between tradition that excludes and hampers, and tradition that adds to the kingdom of God as preached by Jesus. The creeds developed in the second and third centuries no longer speak to many people today. For example, the Nicene Creed focuses only on the birth and death of Jesus, leaving out the entire ministry of Jesus and the focus on the kingdom. There is a need to deconstruct much of our theology before we can reconstruct one that allows for both the useful new and the useable old."

Reflections/Questions to Ponder

- What does thinking and living in "the kingdom way" mean for you?
- How does it promote inclusivity in *your* life journey?
- The legacy left at Emmanuel by Anne, advocacy for radical inclusion, progress made.
- Where do we want to take this or how to expand on radical inclusion within our own community?