

The Second Point of Progressive Christianity
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A middle-aged woman had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she had a near death experience. Seeing God she asked, “Is my time up?”

God said, “No, you have another 43 years, 2 months and 8 days to live.

Upon recovery, the woman decided to stay in the hospital and have a facelift, liposuction, and a tummy tuck. She even had someone come in and change her hair color. Since she had so much more time to live, she figured she might as well make the most of it.

After her last operation, she was released from the hospital. While crossing the street, on her way home, she was killed by an ambulance.

Arriving in front of God, she demanded, “I thought you said I had another 40 years! Why didn’t you pull me from out of the path of the ambulance?”

God replied, “I didn’t recognize you.”

Have you ever wondered if God looks at us and doesn’t recognize us? Would God perhaps ask us to take time out, not to have a facelift, but to evaluate who we have become — who we have become as God’s children and as Christians.

I have to believe that this kind of evaluation would cause us to change our orientation if we took it seriously. Many of us are familiar with this as a matter of sexuality but that’s not what I mean. Changing our orientation means engaging the second point of Progressive Christianity. It means looking through new eyes at the life of Jesus. It means embracing who we are as Metropolitan Community Churches. And perhaps most importantly, it means accepting a most difficult truth: two conflicting things can both be true.

So let’s visit those places for a few minutes.

1. The second point of Progressive Christianity asks us to recognize the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the realm of God and acknowledge that their way is true for them. This orientation asks us to honor the truth of others, not see it as an opportunity to convert them to our truth.
2. If we look at Jesus through new eyes, we might see that he constantly challenged the leader’s of his faith to change their orientation by including everyone. We might also see a Jesus who thought that too many rules around our relationship with God, actually causes us to lose sight of God.

3. If we embrace who we have collectively, as MCC's around the world, defined ourselves to be, we would find these words as part of our statement of purpose:

- We want to build bridges that liberate and unite. At MCC, we have experienced the soul destruction that comes from hate-filled rhetoric. In restoring our souls, we have come to find that our voices will speak the liberation that comes through peace, compassion, love, respect, and grace. As followers of Jesus, we believe in everyone's holy privilege to work out their own salvation. While we are a Christian church who follows Jesus, we respect those of other faith traditions and work together with them to free all those who are oppressed by hate, disregard, and violence.

4. Then there is the challenging concept that two conflicting things can both be true. For example, I love spending time with my partner and little girl. I also love having time to myself. So, there are times when I want to be with them and at the same time, I want to have time alone. These seem like conflicting feelings that could cause a fight between me and them. But it works out a lot better when we allow these conflicting feelings to all exist as true. In other words, we don't have to make one feeling untrue in order for the other feeling to be true. In opening ourselves to other spiritual paths, we have to change our orientation from true and not true to understanding that conflicting things can both be true.

So, you see, when we look at some of the words and documents and precepts that guide our steps, they continually call us to a shifting orientation.

Perhaps the gospel of Matthew gives us the fixed point that we so often need in order to navigate a changing orientation. Verse 22 suggests that our fixed point must be simple acts of hospitality and generosity. This doesn't suggest that there are certain rules that have to be followed or that some are in and some are out but rather, we reflect the nature of God when we are generous and hospitable.

Would God recognize us if we offered a generous spirit to those who know God by a different name? I think so.

Would God recognize us if we opened our table to those of other faith traditions? I think so.

Would God recognize us if we joined with other communities of faith to feed the hungry and liberate those who are oppressed? I think so.

In the end, changing our orientation means shifting our perspective and opening our minds to the bigness of God, the limitless capacity that God has to recognize us all.

Once, my friend and I were walking down the sidewalk in New York City during rush hour. There was all sorts of noise in the city; car horns honking, feet shuffling, people talking. And amid all this noise, my friend looked at me and said, "I hear a cricket."

“No way,” I responded. “How could you possibly hear a cricket with all of this noise? You must be imagining it. Besides, I’ve never seen a cricket in the city.”

“No, really, I do hear a cricket. I’ll show you.” She stopped for a moment, then led me across the street to a big cement planter with a tree in it. Pushing back some leaves she found a little brown cricket.

“That’s amazing!” I said. “You must have superhuman hearing. How did you do that?”

“No, my hearing is just the same as yours. There’s no secret,” my friend replied. “Watch, I’ll show you.” She reached into her pocket, pulled out some loose change and threw it on the sidewalk. Amid all the noise of the city, everyone within thirty feet turned their head to see where the sound of the money was coming from.

“See,” she said. It’s a matter of what you’re listening for.”

As we seek to be people who change our spiritual orientation, perhaps we should ask ourselves, “what are we listening for?”

- Are we listening for the things that make us different from those who practice Judaism?
- Are we listening for opportunities to judge those who worship Mohammad?
- Are we listening for the ways in which the Bible speaks in contrast to the Koran?

OR

- Are we listening for the heritage we share with the Jews?
- Are we listening for the values of love, grace, and compassion as common across all communities of faith?
- Are we listening for the voice of God in unlikely places?

My friends, may God recognize us as children who incline our ears to hear the cricket, not the noise.