

Ponca City Christian

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Seeking, Serving, Sharing
August 20, 2023



Devotional Christian

Matthew 15:21-28

This Gospel reading was a bit troublesome for me. The kind of story you need to wrestle with. Clearly the Canaanite woman was an outsider. Maybe she was shunned because of the way she was shouting at them, we might also assume they disdained her gender, her status as a Gentile, and her demon-possessed daughter. Woman had little standing in a society that needed men to serve as intermediaries in legal and spiritual matters. Since she was a Gentile, the Jews saw her as not only unsaved but also unworthy of salvation, while they viewed themselves as worthy. Finally, the Jews assumed that calamity in life, such as a demon-possessed child, was divine punishment for individual sin. But none of that should've mattered. Jesus welcomes outsiders. Jesus welcomes women. Like the woman at the well. But, in this story, that doesn't seem to be the case. In the end, her persistence, and her view of God, was the expression of faith that Jesus needed to see. And her daughter was healed.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us fully entrust ourselves to you and trust ourselves enough to hang in there and be patient in the face of things we cannot control or change. Amen.

Note from the pastor

Angela and I attended the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in Louisville, KY at the end of July. I was curious to learn what she thought of our experience at the assembly. She was kind enough to write this article to share her reflections.

Thank you, Angela!

~ Pastor Stephen

Reflections from a Recovering Evangelical

By Angela Joy Eby

My church history is a long and complicated journey with many switchbacks, valleys, and mountaintop experiences along the way. I grew up in a holiness evangelical denomination, from which I obtained a Master's degree in Biblical Studies, spent 10 years with the United Methodists, a few years unchurched and guided by self-study, and the last five years amongst a Unity Church community that practices centering prayer outside of an official church organization. And then I started dating a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) pastor, and he invited me to General Assembly.

I don't think I have ever experienced a body of believers who are able to exist in community while holding such different interpretations of what it means to be Christian. I guess that's what it means to be a part of a non-doctrinal church but to

someone who has come from such a different space, it seems like a revolutionary concept. And considering some of the proposals passed and discussions debated over the dense weekend, “revolutionary” seems like the right word. If our Church, with a capital “C,” AKA the Body of Christ, is going to survive the raging tides of a changing world, it will have to go through a revolution—and not implode.

In fact, I find it interesting that the word “revolution” has the word “evolution” within it. It seems every time the world and its culture evolves into a deeper understanding of what it means to be “human,” a revolution crops up to change the way the institutions operate. Those institutions that evolve and adapt remain; those that hold fast to the concrete, literal ways “things have always been done” (which is a fallacy—change is the only thing that does not change) crumble and disappear into the fog of time's past.

Of course, this evolution does not mean that the Church becomes something it is not. But it does mean remembering the Spirit of the faith that creates structures of practice and beliefs. A human does not stop being a human simply because they adapt and change. For example, I no longer eat with my hands (at least most of the time). I have learned to use utensils. I am more refined in my eating habits, but I am still the same person. The Church over the last few millennia has gone through several iterations of evolution as well in order to persist (consider the Protestant Reformation, where people protested some of the practices of the Church, calling for reformed practices that, according to them, seemed more closely to exemplify the Spirit of the teachings of Christ).

To me, that was the crux of what was happening at The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) General Assembly—the Body trying to figure out what it means to be Church in the 21st century. The struggle is real, trying to determine how to hold on to the essential qualities of what make us Christians, while allowing older, perhaps outdated ways of understanding to fall away. I was moved by the passion, discord and unity, and ultimately compassion of the people contending with this understanding. Real people were given the chance to stand up and voice their thoughts and concerns. Votes were cast. Proposals were passed. And here I still stand amazed—even the proposals remain as invitations and suggestions supported by the church’s voting body, rather than edicts or laws. Each church still retains the right to worship as they see fit. Because of this, this denomination seems, to me, to demonstrate what it means to be the living embodiment of the Body of Christ. It is less of an institution and more of a reflection of the individual groups of people worshiping together. It challenges each of us to wrestle like Jacob with the angel of the Lord through the night. It invites each of us to encounter the Spirit of God, to investigate our own heart, to ask the difficult questions, to unfold and become the person, created in God’s own image, in our unique way. And, because the gathering of this church felt guided by the Love that is God, I have been convinced that this Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is my new home in the Body of Christ—my next chosen pathway along my spiritual journey.

Giving in Review

As of July 31, 2023

Income Received YTD	\$177,117.49
Actual Expenses YTD	\$193,049.65
Budgeted Expenses YTD	\$191,625.00