

The People of the Way by Dwight Zscheile
Study Notes

Introduction

- Questions to consider as we work through this book together
 - How do we form disciples who did not grow up in the church?
 - What does it mean to be a disciple?
 - What does it mean to be a church member?
 - Are they the same?
 - How does the shape of life in the Episcopal Church foster depth of commitment to the way of Christ and how does it undermine it?
 - What does it mean to be the body of Christ in an increasingly post-Christian America?
 - Who are we as Episcopalians and what are here for?
- "The People of the Way" is a term for Christians, not Episcopalians
 - "Christians" began as a derogatory term used by non-Christians and was later adopted
 - The early church called itself followers or people of "the Way" meaning the way of Christ
 - Hallmarks of the early church
 - Subversion of the idolatries of the empire
 - Compassion for society's most vulnerable
 - Equality in community life
 - High ethical norms
 - It was a movement that started around one man in the backwater state of Israel, in the area known as Galilee (which was generally disregarded even by Israel) and grew to spread across the entire world. (Luke-Acts)
- Important concepts in understanding the Episcopal Church
 - We are "creedal," not "confessional"
 - Our theology is rich and makes claims of who we are and what we believe, but it is expressed in our liturgy and worship as opposed to in a confession
 - This makes room for many challenges and St. David's is living proof of some of them
 - We began with a desire
 - to be a "via media," or middle way, during the Protestant Revolution
 - The Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 (BCP 877 -878)
 - We come out of a colonial empire
 - Like much of our history Christianity spread through colonialism
 - Today the church in the "empire" is declining and the church in the "colonies" is vibrant and growing
- Our identity is in a crisis as we try to fit into today's world
 - Parable of Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42)
 - We have invested so much in doing "good things" that we have lost a lot of our comfort in talking about God and Jesus. This has only been exacerbated by the shift in worldviews in the West.
- The call set forth by Zscheile is not how to reorganize to be a better version of our past, but how to join in the movement that Christ started 2000 years ago.

- It is not about what we can do to reverse the decline in the church, but how we can join in what God is doing
- God is doing a lot and is moving in our world. Instead of trying to control and lead, we need to relearn how to follow
- For Prof. Zscheile, the church, and myself it is a matter of life and death
- The focus and approach of this book is twofold
 - Spiritual Transformation
 - Gaining clarity about who we are and what we are for (as opposed to what we are against)
 - Helping us to reengage our changing neighborhoods
 - Mission
 - Both of these are to be considered in light of our Anglican theology and history and our changed culture
- Story of Two Little Boys
 - What does the church have to offer?

Chapter 1

- As a church, have we become disconnected? (Bridge to Nowhere)
- History of the Church
 - From Movement to Rome to Holy Roman Empire to Church of England to Colonies to us
 - Established Church to Church of the Establishment
 - Any questions about this?
- Much of our church's cultural memory is clinging to a time when we were the elite
 - There was a time when most presidents and half of congress were Episcopalians
 - Our National Cathedral is an Episcopal parish
 - The 2012 proposed budget cut much of our youth spending and included \$700,000 for lobbying our Federal Gov't (thankfully the outcry from the church amended this)
- Unfortunately, much of our understanding of Mission is wrapped up in power and has led to a benefactor paradigm in Episcopal Mission
 - This is not an intentional decision and it is born out of an honest desire for justice, but it perpetuates a bad dynamic
 - A more appropriate understanding of Mission leads to partnership
 - Understanding the Incarnation is key to understanding Mission
 - As Jesus came to be our guest, so he sends us out to seek shelter in the world
 - Our Bishop makes the distinction of Outreach vs. Mission
- Parts of the church are not ready to let go of being in power, but we no longer are and I would argue this is far better than before
 - The church is not called to be an institution of power, but of meek and humble service
 - Our mission cannot be focused on beneficence any longer, but on partnership

Questions for Discussion

- Tell a story of where you met God. Was it in the church or elsewhere?
- What have your experiences of Mission been like?

Chapter 2

- Changing landscape of faith in America
 - The number of "nones" is quickly growing
 - Still a high number of people identify with Christianity
 - Level of understanding of the Christian faith is pretty low however
 - Young people who grow up in nonreligious homes are more likely to become actively involved in church than those who grow up in Protestant homes
 - We hear about people being more "spiritual" and less interested in "organized religion"
 - Connected to the postmodern tendency to pick and choose what we like from a buffet of beliefs and ideas
- Emergence of "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism"
 - A creator God exists who orders and watches over
 - God wants us to be good, nice, and fair to each other
 - Goal of life is to be happy, feel good, be content
 - God is generally ignored until a problem arises
 - Good people go to heaven
 - "God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process."
 - This is comforting when things are generally good, but when God doesn't respond as expected the wheels come off
- God, faith, and our culture are becoming more fragmented
 - We don't believe in magic anymore
 - As we order our lives around the secular as opposed to the sacred, God and faith become more and more separated from the "everyday" and have less coherence in our lives
 - Now even our everyday life is becoming more and more fragmented
 - Compare life 100 years ago to 50 years ago to today
 - Great freedom and opportunity at the cost of great anxiety and pressure
 - Has lead to ghettos of thought and living and separated us
 - This is why the church is so very important
- A New Apostolic Age
 - Our world is looking more like it did during the days of the early church
 - Episcopal/Anglican tradition are in a great position to take advantage of it
 - In reconnecting with our traditions and ancient roots we can engage a world thirsty for community and connection
 - We can move away from being an establishment church and become an apostolic (sent) church
 - If you spend much time around me you will hear me talking more about our community and how we can engage and offer good news to them than you will about what we can do for ourselves
 - The world of the church is "out there" not "in here"

Questions for Discussion

- Think about those you know who don't participate in a faith community. Why do you think they don't? What can we learn from them? What does the church have to offer them?

- Is community important to you? Where do you find it?

Chapter 3

- Melissa's story
 - Was it a coincidence that the readings were all about bread?
 - Who should decide who is invited to the table?
- Let's read Zscheile's description of what happens at church
 - The Eucharist (literally "thanksgiving") is at the heart of Episcopal worship
 - There is one table (both in church and in heaven) and it is not ours, but God's
 - This is God's great joke on our attempts at schism
- The doctrine of the Holy Trinity
 - Relationship/Community
 - Father, Son, Holy Spirit working intimately together for one another, not against
 - Better described as a dance than a partnership
 - John of Damascus used the Greek word perichoresis - "mingling/greeting one another in the common square"
 - A picture of life we are called not to imitate, but in which to participate
 - Independence/Dependence/Interdependence
 - We were made "in the image of God" meaning we were made to be in relationship, in community, with God and one another
- Our Western world focuses on success, wealth, and power
 - We see these as individual goals
 - This infects our churches as a gospel of prosperity
 - If God valued wealth, power, and success, then Jesus got everything wrong
 - Jesus was born into poverty at one of the weakest moments in the life of Israel
 - Scholars think he gathered about 300 disciples at most by the time of his crucifixion
 - Jesus came to serve and to seek reconciliation
- The place of the cross
 - Jesus dies disgraced, shunned, despised
 - No retribution, but "Father forgive them..."
 - A case study: Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine
- With this message...Pentecost
 - Many languages, many people, sent into the world
 - One body, many parts (Rom, 1Cor)
 - The example of the diamond
- The church...promise and participation

Questions for Discussion

- What does the Eucharist mean to you?
- What have you seen God doing "out there?"
- What does it mean to participate in the gospel?

Chapter 4

- Community of difference
 - We tend to organize ourselves and our communities around "sameness"
 - The gospel calls us to communities of difference
 - Family vs. Household
 - Zscheile argues for use of household to describe church
 - Family is a better description, household is a better understanding
 - Bible and Christian Tradition is a translated/incarnational religion
- Inclusion: its virtues and deficiencies
 - Often a great difference between valuing inclusion and living it out
 - Episcopal Church focuses much on welcome and inclusion, but it has been lopsided
- Uniqueness of the democratic model in the Episcopal Church
 - Aristocratic
 - Representative in nature
 - Seen in how we approach Vestries, Bishops, Rectors
 - Issue: God's love is the same for all of us no matter how smart/simple, rich/poor, etc
 - Priesthood of all believers: All have access to God because of Jesus
 - Modern Liberal
 - Gathering together to get what we want: Majority rule
 - Seen in our larger denominational problems and schism
 - What I believe is more important than what we believe
 - Issue: We are called to die to ourselves
 - God's preferential treatment of the poor
 - "Bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2)
 - If we don't like it here, we'll go down the street
 - General Convention 2003
 - Deliberative
 - Making room for conversation
 - A more hopeful look at a possible future for the church
 - Issue: Too often we look to convince others of our point of view and the goal is conversion as opposed to understanding
 - The Holy Spirit
 - We need magic again
 - "Personal public presence" not an abstract force in the universe
 - Integral to God and the church
 - Great reconciler
 - "Biblically, reconciliation is *God's* work in which we participate. It is not our project or program, or primarily a human effort."
 - If you remember nothing else, remember this quote
 - Our calling? Our mission? To be ambassadors of reconciliation
 - Despite our imperfection God uses us: Consider Peter
 - A ministry of "not yet"

Questions for Discussion

- How have relationships with those different from you influenced your identity and way of seeing the world?
- Have you ever been an outsider to a community? What made you feel welcome or what would have made you feel welcome?
- When have you felt the Holy Spirit moving? Here at St. David's or elsewhere.