

Christian Nationalism: The hope of multiculturalism
Acts 2: 1-21

This is a story we generally only read on Pentecost Sunday. As Christians, we say *this strange - multilingual - multicultural event - celebrating the fiery presence of God that refused to discriminate - is the birth of the Church*. The disciples full of the fire of the Spirit and hope for the future - left the locked room behind - and started working together across cultures and languages to build God's kin-dom here on earth.

So it seems strange then - that *this multilingual, multicultural birth of the church - filled with the presence of God that refused to discriminate* - has evolved into the many rigid, exclusive and narrow-minded churches we see in our country today.

Churches that see themselves as the faithful few in a sea of idolaters - deeply focused on their mission of taking America back for Jesus - making sure we all put Christ back in Christmas and prayer back in public schools.

So, as Christians against Christian Nationalism, it is good for us to remind ourselves of a couple things every so often:

1. Jesus was not Christian. He was Jewish.
2. The United States of America is not a Christian nation. We are a nation of multiple faiths and ethnicities.

Holding these two truths in balance helps to keep us centered in the multicultural origins of our faith - and to prevent us as American Christians from becoming too ethnocentric in our identity - putting our identity in the center and elevating it above all others.

1. Jesus was Jewish - not Christian.
2. The United States of America is not a Christian nation.

Author Diana Butler Bass writes in her article "Christian Nationalism Everywhere:"
America is Not a Christian nation. But it is a country formed, in significant part, by an upstart, brawling religious tradition whose genius would be its capacity for diversity — and its power to demonstrate both the worst and best of human nature - Protestantism.

Protestantism, in all its unwieldy diversity, shaped how Americans learned, imagined, interpreted, and argued. American politics is marked by a never-ending tension between conscience and community, between freedom and mutual responsibility.

Not a Protestant nation, but a nation whose imagination and identity was shaped by an engagement with Protestant diversity and ideals.

Butler Bass suggests the American frontier was an “unintentional laboratory for multiculturalism.” Whenever a particular colony became too rigid in its beliefs or too married to the state, the people would move, and a new Protestant church would pop up.

This is exactly how the Christian Church (DOC) movement was born - on the American frontier- we met in the basements of already established churches and talked about a much more inclusive way of following Jesus - a movement that would bring together people from all sorts of backgrounds rejecting labels and creeds and embracing diversity in community and in thinking.

This laboratory for multiculturalism is alive and well in our churches today:

Our movement continues to build Spirit led communities that are inclusive of all people - all cultures - all languages - all gender identities - all sexual orientations - all classes - all abilities and disabilities. Because we believe the energy of the Holy Spirit does not discriminate - so neither should we. The Holy Spirit’s energy thrives in diversity- and so do we.

We believe that the love of God reflected in Jesus Christ has the power to change lives. We also believe this love of God is so powerful it could even change the world. We acknowledge that we are not the only Christians and that there are many other expressions and understandings of this faith and love of God.

We also know that there are many other religions in the world that teach some of the same things that Christianity teaches (i.e. love of neighbor, peace, justice, kindness, humility). So, we strive to maintain a delicate balance between living and teaching our Christian principles while respecting the teachings of other religions that teach some of the same principles too.

We know that God is bigger than anything we can possibly imagine. We believe that God is a mystery and that God works in mysterious ways. So, while we admit we cannot understand every aspect of God’s love and how it might be lived, taught, and practiced by others. We acknowledge that the love of God reflected in Jesus Christ transforms us, nurtures us, and even saves us, which is worthy of our thanks, praise, and service.

We refuse to be an isolated church within our community. We believe that what unites us is far more powerful than what divides us. That there should be no favored religions in our country just as God has no favorites.

That’s why FCC Fullerton helped to start the Fullerton Interfaith Ministerial Association and Pathways of Hope so many years ago. We believe in the work we do together among all faiths to help those who are poor and without homes in our community.

That’s why we’ve attended Ifars with our Muslim neighbors and hosted local Jewish rabbis, Muslim Imams, and Zen Buddhist masters right here in our sanctuary to share in interreligious dialogue with us.

As we join with our friends from other faiths and cultures for a meal, for conversation, to feed the hungry, or to march for someone's rights - we are blessed time and time again with beautiful multilingual, multicultural glimpses of God's kin-dom right here on earth,

filling us with HOPE...for all we can accomplish...together.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

All-inclusive God,

You created a world with such rich and beautiful diversity. Continue to confront us with people and experiences that expand and widen our worldview. Continue to disturb us with conversations that nudge us beyond our comfort zones.

We give thanks that you love and care for all of your children the same - that you refuse to show favoritism. Your presence among those who are vastly different from ourselves continues to remind us of the endless possibilities of your universe. Your ever-expanding table of hospitality continues to challenge our understanding of welcome and inclusion.

Work in us, O God. May we be advocates of your love and grace, especially among those pushing your beloved children to the margins.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Invitation to Discipleship

We pray that every country and culture thrive in peace, health, and freedom. That all have access to clean water and food and a safe place to live. It is not a utopian dream, but it is the focus of our giving, our work, our prayers, and of course our songs. Let us sing of our work and prayers together...

Benediction

Send us from this space, O God, embracing your world of rich and beautiful diversity. May we seek out experiences that expand our worldview and conversations that nudge us beyond our comfort zones.

May we go from this space as advocates of your love and grace, especially among those spreading fear and hatred.

In Jesus' name we pray and go, Amen.