**Sermon: Good Religion Keeps an Open Mind *10/12/14***

Excerpts from Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope by Brian McLaren.

**TWO VIEWS OF JESUS’ GOOD NEWS**

Of course, there aren’t really just two views; there are hundreds—at least as many as there are denominations of Christianity, and maybe even as many as there are individual Christians, since each of us has a view of Jesus both like and unlike the views of others. But these two views—perhaps starkly or even crudely described—will serve to show two ends of a broadening spectrum.

THE HUMAN SITUATION

*Conventional View:* God created the world as perfect, but because our primal ancestors, Adam and Eve, did not maintain the absolute perfection demanded by God, God has irrevocably determined that the entire universe and all it contains will be destroyed, and the souls of all human beings—except for those specifically exempted—will be forever punished for their imperfection in hell.

*Emerging View:* God created the world as good, but human beings—as individuals, and as groups—have rebelled against God and filled the world with evil and injustice. God wants to save humanity and heal it from its sickness, but humanity is hopelessly lost and confused, like sheep without a shepherd, wandering further and further into lostness and danger. Left too themselves, human beings will spiral downward in sickness and evil.

BASIC QUESTIONS; WHAT GUESTIONS DID JESUS COME TO ANSWER?

*Conventional View:* Since everyone is doomed to hell, Jesus seeks to answer one or both of these questions: How can individuals be saved from eternal punishment in hell and instead go to heaven after they die? How can God help individuals be happy and successful until then?

*Emerging View:* Since the human race is in such desperate trouble, Jesus seeks to answer this question: What must be done about the mess we’re in? The mess refers to both the general human condition and to its specific outworking among his contemporaries living under domination by the Roman Empire and who were confused and conflicted as to what they should od to be liberated.

JESUS’ MESSAGE: HOW DID JESUS RESPOND TO THE CRISIS?

*Conventional View:* Jesus says, in essence, “If you want to be among those specifically qualified to escape being forever punished for your sins in hell, you must repent of your individual sins and believe that my Father punished me on the cross so he won’t have to punish you in hell. Only if you believe this will you go to heaven when earth is destroyed and everyone else is banished to hell. That is the good news.

*Emerging View:* Jesus says, in essence, “I have been sent by God with this good news—that God loves humanity, even in its lostness and sin. God graciously invites everyone and anyone to turn from his or her current path and follow a new way. Trust me and become my disciple, and you will be transformed, and you will participate in the transformation of the world, which is possible, beginning right now.” This is the good news.

PURPOSE OF JESUS: WHY IS JESUS IMPORTANT?

*Conventional View:* Jesus came to solve the problem of “original sin,” meaning that he helps qualified individuals not to be sent to hell for their sin or imperfection. In a sense, Jesus saves these people from God, or more specifically, from the righteous wrath of God, which sinful human beings deserve because they have not perfectly fulfilled God’s just expectations, expressed in God’s moral laws. This escape from punishment is not something they earn or achieve, but rather a free gift they receive as an expression of God’s grace and love. Those who receive it enjoy a personal relationship with God and seek to serve and obey God, which produces a happier life on Earth and more rewards in heaven.

*Emerging View:* Jesus came to become the Savior of the world, meaning he came to save the earth and all it contains from its ongoing destruction because of human evil. Through his life and teaching, through his suffering, death, and resurrection, he inserted into human history a seed of grace, truth, and hope that can never e defeated. This seed will, against all opposition and odds, prevail over the evil and injustice of humanity and lead to the world’s ongoing transformation into the world God dreams of. All who find in Jesus God’s hope and truth discover the privilege of participating in his ongoing work of personal and global transformation and liberation from evil and injustice. As part of his transforming community, they experience liberation from the fear of death and condemnation. This is not something they earn or achieve, but rather a free gift they receive as an expression of God’s grace and love.