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Moving from Dualism to Living in the Grey

About two years ago I sat up in that balcony and watched Ashton Clatterbuck give a sermon. Honestly I don't remember a lot from that day I just remember that I thought it was really cool to see a student give a sermon. At the time I had thought I was going to Donegal for high school. Over the summer that changed and when I started going to Lancaster Mennonite I found myself enrolled in Jesus Story my sophomore year. In this class we are given projects to choose from close to the start of the year, so out of a variety of many different projects many that would have been easier than this, I chose to give a sermon. Now I tend to set my mind to something and then do it. After almost two years of thinking about it, I'm finally standing here, giving you a sermon.

Today this service is focused on "Living in the Grey" so I will mostly be focusing on Dualism and Bianarism. In an article from January, Richard Rhorer says "If we are trying to rebuild Christianity from the bottom up, we need to try to understand Jesus, the one who began it all (even though he probably never intended to start a new religion). I am convinced that Jesus was the first non dual religious teacher of the West, and one reason we failed to understand so much of his teaching, much less follow it, is because we tried to understand it with dualistic minds. In his life and ministry, Jesus modeled and exemplified non duality more than giving us any systematic teaching on it." This is stating that we need to try and break out of dualistic thinking.

There are a lot of different ways to talk about dualism, I am going to focus on how our minds are programmed to think about dualism. Dualism is the division of something in two contrasting aspects. Binarism is similar to dualism. We tend to think in black and white, good and evil, in other words we think in opposites. We tend to look at each other and go, well if you're not this you must be that. Our minds are programmed to think that everyone, or everything is one thing or the other. Like there is no in between. But in reality there are many things that can't be categorized in to these right or left boxes. We especially use dualism when making split judgements, like when we meet someone for the first time we come to quick conclusions, and when these conclusions are challenged it is hard for us to change that view of someone in our mind.

Dualism and binarism has been embedded in our thinking for awhile, and while it is one way to think, there are others. This way of thinking limits us to an Us v. Them perspective. The truth is many societies have always thought in strict binaries, which limit our ability to think outside the box today. In fact ancient texts show that Judaism once recognized many more than just Male and Female genders. So why do we now have such a limited view of gender? Thinking in these ways is limiting, because it promotes judgement. Judgement that we are better than them, but who exactly defines who is us or them?

So now I'm going to ask a few questions that you can all answer out loud. So are you a cat person or a dog person? Do you prefer Vanilla or Chocolate, what about night or day?

Now imagine that everyone is now judging you on your answer. Because we all

are, in a way. We are all making assumptions about our neighbors answers to the questions, even if they are subconscious assumptions, there still being made. We especially make assumptions about people when maybe we haven't seen them for awhile and they have changed the next time we see them. This even happened to Jesus. When he went to his hometown, the bible says he couldn't do any miracles there, because anything he would have done would have been seen through the filter of the person the people in his hometown had already decided he was. Jesus was the little boy who played with their kids, not some prophet. He was what they all thought he was, Mary's child, the carpenter.

By thinking in strict binaries we tend to exclude people. These boundaries are embedded in so many things, like good/evil, male/female, gay/straight, republican/democrat, and black/white. We see this today, especially in our country. At the borders, and even within them. It's Us v. Them. For many of my friends it's a struggle between faith and identity. Many protestant groups have made it clear in many instances that you can't be LGBT+ because it's against God's will, while being a christian. Or you can't be in this country because you weren't born here. Here at CMCL I have learned to follow the commandment Love your neighbor as yourself, which translates to our immigrant neighbors, or the gay couple down the street. I am grateful for how we are challenged to thinking critically about the core message from Jesus and how we welcome everyone. This is what all Churches should look like; they should be diverse, and sexuality or documentation shouldn't matter. This is why Lancaster is the #1 refugee capital of america, with about 20% more refugees than any other city. With binarism and dualistic thinking we reject the very people who need to be here.

This is something that we all have to be more aware about. In my case I have really worked to understand my sexuality and gender. I think something that I struggled with was that I was told that you can be gay or straight, but that misses the point of Bisexual people, or anyone else who may like more than one gender. And with gender, it's Male or Female. Most people understand the term transgender, but when they hear about gender fluid or non binary people, they don't fit in to either box, so what label do they get? Many people describe sexuality and gender as a spectrum, but a spectrum has two defined points and then a space in the middle. A spectrum excludes the people who may be all or none of those two spots on the spectrum. Where do Agender people who don't identify with either gender, or Pansexual, who like all genders. Where do they go on the spectrum, there's not really a way to make a spectrum large enough to encompass everything, and even identities that aren't identified we don't have to label everything.

It's in our nature to categorize things and it is my hope today that we continue to challenge that view. There are so many things that we label and make assumptions from. Another thing we're constantly judging people about is politics. There's two sides, it's liberal and conservative. And no matter what you say people are always going to judge you on that. I think this also contributes to our dualistic views and binarism. We can't keep labeling people and then assuming that they will fit in to the boxes we put them in. I think that this is especially hard for the people who know the person the most, they don't want to let go of who they thought they were, and can't believe that they have changed or are something different than they were labeled as. In dualism Jesus didn't exactly teach us directly, but he lead by example. I want to challenge all of us, including myself, to keep learning from each other as we all stretch and grow. Throughout my youth going to

this church, and interacting with this community has taught me so much. Thank you for being a community I can feel safe in and for providing a community that welcomes everyone.

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