

Monday Quotes



Grain

“Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate.”

—Edward Said.

Field

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.”^[a] ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²² Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said.... ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah,^[b] nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Thoughts

“How might the development of America have been different without slave labor?” Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Fennell Okuwob ask in their book, “Multiethnic Conversations.” Rev. Tom Knoll recently directed us to that question in a discussion about the book he is leading for a group of ELCA advocacy staff. One of the participants answered that without ever allowing slavery we wouldn’t have as much income inequality today. Forced free labor made some people extremely wealthy. I thought about how so many constructs built upon manipulating religion and using pseudo-sciences were created to “prove” white superiority. Those systems put in place to justify greed have lingered beneath the surface of our daily lives in ways we don’t even notice and that sometimes explode above the surface. In the midst of that history, which we are all a part of, how do we answer the question of who we are?

“Who are you?” the people asked John in the desert? John responded with a confession of who he was not. The Greek for “confess” can also be translated as “to declare publicly.” And the word “confess” has a couple of different meanings and nuances in the church. We confess our faith using confessions, which are like creeds. We also confess our sins. John indeed professed God in Christ. But wasn’t he also confessing a temptation to say he was more than he actually was? Maybe this wasn’t the first time John engaged with such a struggle. What if in response to the question about his identity, John would have declared, “Why yes. Yes, I am the Messiah,” and put energy into sustaining the lie? What kind of greed would have followed? What complicated justifications of the false claim would have been construed? But his answer was, No, that’s not who I am, and he pointed to Christ. Perhaps John died a little to himself in the wilderness. How very liberating. With the grace of God, some decisions in history are freeing. Happy Monday!

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Many Blessings upon you,

Pastor Cindy