



Holy Listening, Hard Conversations

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The most challenging conversations I've ever had about faith and justice haven't been with strangers, but with people I've known and loved my whole life. There is a unique type of heartbreak when someone you love sees the world so differently than you. Keeping the dialogue going can feel Sisyphean. Even as someone with many years of working in the intersection of politics, religion, and storytelling, these past few months have had me struggling to find the words.

I am neither the first nor the last person to struggle with this. Yet, in my personal life, I do believe that staying in relationship with those who view the world differently than us is a sacred undertaking in the struggle for justice.

At the heart of Jesus' ministry was a radical openness not just to the marginalized, but also to those seen as immoral actors. In Luke 5, we hear the story of Jesus eating with the tax collectors, a group associated with Roman oppression and largely considered as traitors. When questioned why he would break bread with such immoral individuals, Jesus famously replies: "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:27–32). To me, this story is emblematic of the tradition of radical love put forward in the gospels. The message of openness gives me hope for the transformative power of relationship. It also, in my experience, can be an extraordinarily difficult message to live out.



come easily. Even when the individual is someone you have known your whole life, maintaining these relationships can be exhausting, painful, and at times destructive. Knowing when to step away is crucial, yet the boundaries of that decision are elusive. When does a clash of values become a denial of dignity? When should we gently correct others when they misstep vs. offer a bold and prophetic condemnation? When should we resist the temptation of comfortable echo chambers vs. intentionally surround ourselves with likeminded friends and collaborators? These are questions I find myself constantly navigating in our divided world and I don't pretend to have figured out the answer.

But I try to have faith in the transformative power of relationship. My approach to religion is one that is not solely about the content of beliefs, but the posture with which we hold them. We can show up fiercely in our moral convictions and show up tenderly in our personal relationships. This is not an either/or.

I write this reflection not as a prescription, but as an invitation. This work of staying in dialogue looks different for each of us, especially for individuals and communities who experience historical and ongoing harm. Not all relationships or dialogues are able to yield productive fruit. But for those who keep trying to build bridges in divided times—I thank you. I am especially grateful for those individuals who clam up during difficult conversations at the dinner table but choose to stutter their way through regardless. This is holy work.

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