

March 14, 2021  
Fourth of Lent

**Meditation:** “Wokey, wokey!”

Language is such a funny thing, don't you think? Especially the English language. I mean farmers produce produce; when the garbage dump is full, they refuse refuse; if you abandon your cake in an arid place you desert your dessert in the desert; if aquatic athletes disagree on form, you could say they were having a row about how to row; if a violinist curtsies with their instrument in hand, you could say they took a bow with their bow; if the timber beams and tongue and groove planks above your head need to be varnished you could say your ceiling needs sealing. I pity anyone taking English as a second language. Heck, many who call English their first language have trouble with the language. For example, many don't know the difference between 'bring' and 'take'.

What I'm having trouble with is some words that are in common parlance but mean nothing to me. For example, what is 'cisgender'? I've heard of gender, and even transgender, but cisgender? I looked it up. It means those who identify as the same gender they were assigned at birth. So, if a baby was born and the doctor took one look and said, “It's a girl,” and when that baby grew up and later self-identified as a woman, then she is cisgender.

There's another word I have trouble grasping; a word that I've heard frequently lately, especially in the wake of a year of Black Lives Matter and the current trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd. Woke; as in, 'she's so woke.' What does that mean? Or, 'he is fake woke.' What the heck does that mean? If woke means what I think it means, past tense of wake, and if he is not woke, then he must be past tense of sleep... slept. He's so slept! So, if they mean he's fake woke, why don't they just say he's slept? That still doesn't tell me what woke means, in the common parlance. Well, again, I looked it up in the Oxford dictionary. Woke, in American vernacular, means to be conscious of social injustice, particularly as it relates to racism. 'She's so woke,' means that she is conscious of racial injustice.

Did anyone see the Oprah interview with Harry and Meghan? I found it most interesting when Harry said that Meghan had opened his eyes about what it was like to be a person of colour in the world; what it was like to be in her skin; what it was like to be her. You might say that he became a woke bloke! And that William denies any racism in the Royal Family sounds like he is still slept.

I've started a six-part course called Racial Justice Training. Part two is the coming Tuesday evening. I want to share something from session one with you. It all starts with stereotypes. When you add belief and value to a stereotype, you get prejudice. When you add action to prejudice, you get discrimination. When you add power to discrimination, you get systemic oppression. Racism is a form of systemic oppression. It

is about the power of a system supporting discrimination. I think that Harry now understands this. I also think William doesn't. By denying racism, he's not even using the right term. I think what he is trying to say is that there is no stereotyping, or maybe even no prejudice within the Royal Family. But racism....that's about power and the Royal Family has that in spades. Surely William cannot deny that systemic oppression, systemic injustice exists.

I hear you. This is all very interesting, but what does any of this have to do with the gospel? I have a thought. Let's try this. How does this sound? If God sent Jesus so that those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned; what we are saying is that God sent Jesus so that we would become woke to Jesus, and not fake woke, or slept, to Jesus, for to be woke would be fake condemned but to be slept would be to be condemned, and God doesn't want us to be condemned because God loves us. There's just one problem. Woke is about social injustice, and to be woke to Jesus means acknowledging him? Wait! What?

Is the text really saying that God simply wants us to acknowledge Jesus when it says "so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Or is something else, something deeper going on here? I think I may be starting to woke up. Does God simply want us to acknowledge Jesus as an individual, or does God want us to see who Jesus is, what he stood for, the way he lived. The Way. Early Christians said they were followers of 'The Way.' Is the message here really about the way Jesus lived rather than about the fact that Jesus lived? If that's right, that would mean that God so loved the world that God sent Jesus to show us the way we ought to live, the way we can find life eternal, the woke way.

But being woke is, yes, a way of seeing things, but it is specifically about social injustice. What was the way Jesus lived? Well, he consorted with sinners of all sorts: those who collaborated with their Roman rulers by collecting taxes to support their military-industrial complex; and those women who were widowed and without a male to support them so they turned to the world's oldest profession – to give just two examples. Jesus was concerned about the welfare of orphans and widows, the differently abled and the socially outcast. Jesus was woke to social injustice in his world.

To be woke to Jesus is to be woke to what he was woke to, social injustice. And the light that Jesus shines into the world is the light of truth and love. So, if I were to think about this, and take it a step further, the gospel might sound something like this in 2021:

"And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be revealed, that whoever becomes woke to the reality of who he is; woke to the way of social justice may have life eternal.

For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, so that everyone who becomes woke to him may not perish, but may have life eternal.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved by becoming woke. Those who are woke to him are not condemned; but those who are slept are condemned already, because they are not woke to the truth of who Jesus is, what Jesus represents. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved slept rather than woke because it was easier; because it maintained the status quo; because it kept them in positions of power and control and wealth. For all who are unjust hate the light and do not become woke, so that they may not be woke to the injustice that they do. But those who are woke come to the light, so that all may become woke.” And this is the light: the love of God.

Love is at the root of it all. Love leads to justice, because how could one love their neighbour and treat them unjustly? And justice leads to peace; not just the absence of violence, but contentment with knowing that all have what they need to thrive. And peace leads to joy. Being slept to love is the way that destroys the soul and human relations, but being woke to love and injustice is the way that leads to lasting peace, contentment, and joy for all people.

So I say to you, wokey, wokey. It's time to change this world, one neighbour at a time.