**Believing Generously**

*Perhaps the most pressing theological challenge facing Christianity in the 21st century is to come up with a more generous way for Christians to both profess our own faith and find worth in the faith of others. This session invites us to reflect on what we really think about “other” religions.*

*This is an excerpt from C.S. Lewis’ classic work on faith, “Mere Christianity”…*

I have been asked to tell you what Christians believe, and I am going to begin by telling you one thing that Christians do not need to believe. If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong all through. If you are an atheist you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of the truth. When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong. As in arithmetic – there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong: but some of the wrong answers are much nearer to bring right than the others.

*Here are some possible jumping off points for your discussion:*

* What has been your experience with other religions (or with atheism), either as a practitioner, or as a friend, relative, spouse of someone with a different faith? How have your experiences of other faith traditions informed your own sense of Christian faith or spirituality in general?
* Do you find that you hold higher/lower opinions of certain non-Christian religions as opposed to others?
* One the classic tenants of historical Christian Theology is that Jesus Christ is the only true pathway to God. C.S. Lewis, writing in the 1940s, is trying to hold that position, while being as generous as possible to non-Christians. On a scale of one to ten, how generous do you think he’s being?
* How important to your own faith is affirming that Jesus Christ is the only true pathway to God? If it is very important, then what does that say about the limits of generosity towards non-Christians? If it isn’t very important, then what for you is especially distinctive about your faith as a Christian?

A Prayer:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

P.S.-- What do you think of this prayer? Generous? Not generous? (It’s from the Book of Common Prayer, p.815)