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Spellers's "The church cracked open: Disruption, decline and new hope for beloved community" (book review)

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Book Review



Spellers, Stephanie (2021). *The church cracked open: Disruption, decline and new hope for beloved community*. Church Publishing Incorporated: New York, NY. 152 pp. \$ 16.95. ISBN:9781640654242

The author Stephanie Spellers is most well-known in the Episcopal church community. She is the presiding Bishop's Canon for Evangelism, Reconciliation and Creation. This book focuses on social issues within the American church and society. Spellers want us to see recent events including the pandemic and the brutal killing of George Floyd as an opportunity to break from our old traditions and attitudes and share Christ's love with a diverse and hurting community. She challenges us to face our national history of racism and discrimination. She discusses the history of her own denomination in being complicit in colonialism and slavery.

The book begins with the gospel account of the woman with the alabaster jar of costly nard who lovingly broke it and poured it out on Jesus. She likens it to American churches who need to break down walls and pour out God's precious love on the oppressed and hurting. "God invites us into a covenant whereby the power of the Holy Spirit we can choose to allow our hearts to break, and then take the pieces –our lives, our goods, our love and our privileges –and share it all like a broken loaf of communion bread (p. 94). Spellers refers to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of a "beloved community," brought about by justice, "reconciliation and redemption (p.27)."

Spellers reminds us that, Jesus states in Mark: 8:35, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it (p. 87-88)." In the Greek, the word "kenosis," means "self-emptying." This means letting go of privilege, status, or any sense of superiority. Another principle she discusses is solidarity with the oppressed. "Move your body, your resources, and your heart into place among the hurting people with whom Jesus already stands (p.88)." The final principle is discipleship, "In our daily life we continue in Jesus's way of love (88)."

Spellers succeeds in giving the reader greater insight into how the church should impact our society.

Sadly, since our country is so divided some readers may become defensive at her message instead of listening with understanding and open hearts. Lay people and

clergy can study it individually or in groups there are additional sources for study available from www.churchpublishing.org.

Reviewer

Cynthia Hammell