



September 19, 2018

AGE OF THE SPIRIT

"I'm a practicing Christian, not always a believing one," a friend once said to Harvey Cox, a long-time professor at Harvard and the author of the 2009 book *The Future of Faith*. I bet that a lot of us can relate to that. We are practicing Christians, not always believing ones. And that is just as it should be.

Cox proposes that Christian faith is moving into a third age, which he calls the *Age of the Spirit*. In this new age, Christianity focuses more on following the way of Jesus than on defining beliefs *about* Jesus, and there is a greater openness to other faith traditions that practice similar values. The *Age of the Spirit* rejects the authority of doctrine in favor of the centrality of discipleship.

This third age is similar to the first one. *The Age of Faith* was the time from the life of Jesus until the emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the empire at the end of the fourth century. In the first age, Christians lived with the confidence of faith, and gave themselves in love and service to create community with their neighbors.

The *Age of Belief* became dominant when Constantine prompted the church to codify a system of belief in creed and doctrine, and it is still common to define Christians primarily by what we believe, instead of what we seek to practice. Of course, there were millions of Christians who practiced the way of Christ during the *Age of Belief*.

Our church belongs to the new *Age of the Spirit*. The message of welcome that is printed on the back cover of our Sunday order of worship includes these words: "welcome to this place, where we are free to come just as we are—with our questions and doubts, our faith and our certainty." What makes us a Christian community is the life we seek to practice, a life that is shaped by the life of Jesus.

I'll see you in church.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister