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SPEAKERS

Sam, Edgardo Colón-Emeric

Sam 00:04

Welcome to The Table Talk podcast, a place where United Methodists across Tennessee and Western Kentucky can connect with one another in deeper conversation around life and faith. My name is Sam McLaughlin, and I'm the Senior Pastor of Bell made United Methodist Church in West Nashville. And I will be your host for today's episode. And today we are honored to be in dialogue with Dr. Edgardo cologne, Emory, Dean of Duke Divinity School. We're exploring Wesleyan discipleship and as Dr. Ed gatos shares its four healing gifts, family, faith, Fiesta and forgiveness. Specifically, we will talk about the idea of Fiesta as a healing gift, and how it might inform our church's path forward. Before we dive in, we'll start with a question we asked of all our table top guest, Dr. Edgardo, where did you grow up? Just tell us a little bit more about yourself, and what is your current ministry context.

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 01:05

Thank you. It is wonderful to be with you. And to share where I grew up. Well, I grew up in Puerto Rico, which meant that I grew up speaking Spanish. I grew up in a Latin American culture, and came to the United States to study in the university settings here in the United States, and have stayed in this country ever since. And my current ministry setting is Duke Divinity School, to which I arrived 30 years ago, now. I arrived to do my masters of divinity work, then I pastored. Here in Durham, North Carolina, which is where Duke Divinity School resides, for five years before beginning my PhD work at Duke University. And I was hired after I completed my work at the PhD, to start the Hispanic Cultural Studies at Duke Divinity School and have remained here ever since. I am an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. And that defines my primary identity.

Sam 02:33

That's awesome. Thank you for sharing, you know, we find ourselves in an interesting moment in United Methodism. And so how would you put into words, what this moment is about? Or how would you describe this moment?

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 02:48

I would describe it, first of all, the tragically that we find ourselves in a season of Lent, moving towards Easter, and we hold together the tensions of cross and resurrection. And because of that is that for as I see it, we're in a season of discernment, and a decision where the question of why am I UMC is not simply because of custom, but because of commitment. And in that regard, I find ourselves to be in a very important moment, in a season of ultimately a season of the spirit, spirit who makes all things new, and will lead us more deeply into the heart of God.

Sam 03:35

Amen. You share that our Wesleyan discipleship equips us for this moment in unique ways and that that is actually a way of healing. So what do you mean by that?

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 03:47

Methodism understood itself in the beginning, as an expression of real Christianity, as one that would be concerned with a holistic care for the person that salvation meant more than going to heaven, or more than being saved. It meant being restored it it means meant being reconciled and reformed and realigned and renewed in the image of God. The name method is, by the way, that was one that was, according to Wesley, not just a term of reproach, which it was, but also alluded to a term applied to ancient Greek physicians who promoted health through diet and disciplines. And that, in that ancient description was one that Wesley mentioned a number of times throughout his ministry, that this is why the Methodists were called Methodists. And that the practice of health through diet and disciplines was one that could be applied to Christianity, the diet of the Lord's Supper, and disciplines of prayer, of scriptural reading of holy conversation like we're having now, and of attending to all the means of grace serving the poor, and the marginalized. So that in these ways, people are brought to perfect health and are restored in the image to which God created them. And so when I speak of a Wesleyan way of healing, I have very much in mind, how the early Methodists were associated with being practitioners of health, and that, in fact, the most published and read books, book of John Wesley was not as book of sermons, but as primitive physic and his prescription for home remedies as it were, that would be accessible to people who were not able to afford physicians in John Wesley's time because the people called Methodists were largely being grown from the working in lower classes.

Sam 06:18

Hmm, yeah. So sort of this element of how does faith affect the real person? You know, how is it practical? How does that help with healing and restoration and of maybe body mind, soul spirit, you know, all of those combined? Absolutely. Absolutely. Like it. So you share four healing gifts that are Wesleyan way offers us family, faith Fiesta, I'm really excited about that one, and forgiveness. And I'm just thrilled to hear more. So can you sort of walk us through these one by one, and we'll start with family?

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 06:53

Sure. I think of the gift of family. It's a gift also that I think of it in conversation with my cultural context. And my cultural background as a Hispanic and the significance of familia for Hispanic people, is that significance of Familia is also why I think it's important to have a gift to read the Methodist story in Spanish as it were, that is to say, through Hispanic eyes, and to embrace the gift of loving, telling the story that I love to tell the story of the Methodist family. Often when I'm in Methodist Catholic dialogues,

which I participate in on behalf of our denomination or church. Catholics will ask you a theological question about Methodist practice of the Lord's Supper. And we'll answer with a story of why we do things the way we do. And I find that to be very typical of the people called Methodist because their sense of being a family. And I think is so important in our in our response to our times, to reclaim our family story, as being a good story is not being simply one of this function of tragedy, nor one of those theologia and romanticizing the past, but one where we are honest to our family story, with our challenges with our failures with our sins, and also honest with how God has been present through our story. And through our family stories people call Methodists and that we have gifts to share from our family, with other Christian families and beyond. And so that for me is the gift that comes from family and of understanding ourselves as people called Methodists, as a family, a family with some stresses, and with some people who are not talking to each other, that happens in family, sadly, but that's not the end of the story. And so I begin with that give the family and what I hope is we can develop some practices on telling our family story, that are, as I mentioned, are more honest, and also more hopeful.

Sam 10:26

You know, as you look at maybe the story of people called Methodist, what do you think are some of the key moments or like the key defining moments of that story?

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 10:55

Wesley speaks of the story as beginning in Oxford. With us, he called it a few men who were studying together and serving the outcasts together. And then a story that moves to Savannah, and to his child of challenges and failures in ministry, and Savannah, then that moves to London. And so, first, the first Oxford as the first rise of Methodism, Savannah as the second race of Methodism, and they're not London as a third route of Methodism. And I mentioned this because I love the savannah chapter, that the savannah chapter is one that is largely written as one of failure, personal failure of occasional failure, could talk much more about that, but probably don't have time for that. But that was we came to regard it as one of the chapters in the story of the rise of Methodism. And that, in the story of the people call Methodist, there are chapters of failure. And yet, those are chapters that are also part of our story, because the Christian story is one that has failure at the beginning of it, and throughout it. The story begins with a with someone who was crucified, and who his followers believed he was the one who would say this real. So they were not expecting Easter and resurrection. And yet that is not left behind that is told us the story of the failure is told as part of the story. So for me, the story of the people called Methodists requires being honest about our failures, and honest about our favorite failures in the manner in which we confess our sins, we do so with that within a sense of an economy of forgiveness, that we can be honest, because we know we are loved. And we can be honest and repent, because we know that there is something to turn to that it offers new possibilities. So I think that Wesleyan emphasis on prevenient grace, and how the grace of God is present through our story, even before we're aware of it, of grace that justifies that forgives, that allows us to be honest about our failures, and repent of them knowing that we are not to despair, but that there's possibility of new birth, and of holiness. And I would say that we have been shy in sharing the gifts of holiness, in our midst, with ourselves and with others, and so many things I could say about the story of people come Methodist, but it is a good story. And I believe that we need to, in order to tell it a new way to see it and you and to see the possibilities of how God has for us and also how God has been present for us. And throughout our story. Even when we've been unfaithful to it. God has been lavish in great and mercy.

Sam 14:08

And I think maybe to to see ourselves as the continuation of the story, you know, and and key characters in this story. It's like we continue the story of Jesus, we continue Jesus's work were part of that story, you know, and then we're part of the continuing work of the Methodist Church and like what is happening in this present moment, and maybe to not be discouraged about that tension, you know, between sorrow and bliss, you know, between the need for forgiveness, and the grace that we receive when we're honest about it. I would really appreciate talking about that the tension within the story, and accepting it for what it is and also Um, the poet, Rainer Marie roquet said, you know, we anticipate the brightness of a new page, and it feels like you've got to hold on to that possibility and that hope and keep writing the story. Right? You know, like, absolutely.

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 15:13

Then I think of the gift of faith. And, and faith as a healing practice is something that goes back to Scripture, and the times that Jesus would touch someone speak with someone and tell that person your faith has made you well. The way in which the language of salvation and the language of healing are really in the Greek, the same word. And so that there's a sense of the person being gifted by faith, gifted with healing in holistic ways of being able to see a new and to be able to enter the world in ways that are life giving for themselves and for others. And even as there is sometimes doubt in the mid mids of the of the faith. There's also faith in the midst of doubt as well. And so have that gift of faith is something that people can Methodist, have always preached about from the beginning sought to embody from the beginning and something that we have as a gift to receive for ourselves again, and to share with others.

Sam 15:19

Okay, so let's dig into fiesta.

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 16:00

I begin with a story. In 1998, I was in the midst of starting a new church, church plant among the Hispanic community in Durham, North Carolina. And we had been meeting throughout the year to talk to pray to read the Bible in homes and Holy Week, throwing near. And as I was speaking with the people with whom I was gathering, one of them said we'll probably because coming we should have a worship service. And of course, it's a new pastor, church planter that was music to my ears was strangely warm. I said yes, let's do that. So we planned a Good Friday service in a hole. And the hole was in portion of Durham, where there were other Hispanic families, it was actually at that time and unpaved road even. And I drove to the, to the to the house, and had invited some other people to come join us. I get to the house. And I see that the house was decorated with streamers and balloons. And they had tables that with colorful tablecloths and food and on chafing dishes that sink, okay, this is not what I expected for a Good Friday service. We gathered inside in the living room, packed sitting in the floor standing for worship service. And, and they like preached and celebrated Eucharist, which is not common and Good Friday. And then afterwards, we had this banquet. And it seemed like it was Easter Sunday and Good Friday, wrapped together and adding a birthday party and maybe a little bit of along with that we had some PRs as well. And it was Fiesta because there was a sense in which Good Friday could not be observed. Without the light of Easter Sunday. That Good Friday, depicted the reality, the daily reality for some of my congregation, that congregation of mostly undocumented immigrants, where we're trying to eke a living in in very challenging circumstances. And so we gathered for Good Friday boat with a sense of Easter, couldn't pretend that he was not rich and he was rich. And it was because he lives that we could also enter more deeply into the mystery of Good Friday. And so for me,

this was fiesta. Fiesta is a way precisely of entering into the reality of the world of being more in tune with its wounded history, but in ways that signify and point to the end of that history, the end of that story, which is fiesta. That's what we get in Scripture. There's so many of the images of the end, in the parables in the in the book of Revelation and the prophets are of extravagance, celebration. You don't have images of an intimate dinner four to one person and God and basking in in staring into each other's eyes. You have this sense of multitudes and of and of overabundance and that's fiesta. It's a celebration of the goodness of being of being alive. And this is something I saw my congregation slow time that when they would have a birthday for a kid A two year old or one year old wouldn't remember it, there was always going over the top and celebrating that, and extravagance, that even when you have no means you pour everything you have into the Fiesta, you don't hold anything back. Because you celebrate life. While it is there to be celebrated. You don't know what tomorrow will bring. So you celebrate today. So that's that's the sense of Fiesta, which then becomes part of the feast, feast and Fiesta go together, the celebration then of Good Friday, have Easter.

Sam 20:48

That's so good. That's so good. And maybe sometimes when I talk about the table, I try to talk about that it's extraordinary in the sense of, you know, we come around the table together as a collective body and worship. But it's so ordinary, it's like your table in your house. You know, it's like the table at the restaurant. It's throwing everything into a birthday party. And it's like we've it feels like we have so hold on to both of those so that we have that Fiesta like every time we gather around the table, right? And it kind of presents a follow up question for me is like, do you think people need more celebration in their daily lives, you know, more Fiesta in their daily lives?

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 21:34

Well, it's a good question that there's a character to Fiesta, that it is an extraordinary event, it's not a daily affair. You cannot live in perpetual Fiesta, this side of history or that, that the fears that disrupts and interrupts the ordinary, at the same time that it casts the ordinary in new light. And it shows the depth and, and richness of the ordinary. And so so for me that there's a way in which Fiesta does celebrate the goodness of life and his wife yes has to typically revolve around ordinary things a birthday, we happen every year. A a key Sanghera. It's a reasonably significant Fiesta in Hispanic community in Latin American communities, the Fiestas that we celebrate, also with weddings, and but then also they have that ordinary character, but also a certain religious dimension to it, that makes it more than a party way in which it points and opens to transcendence to something beyond what is what we are seeing here. And that I think that that's also an important character of fiesta. And that's what the connection of feast and Fiesta is so significant. So, Phil, I do think that, yes, the ordinary is hallowed, if you will, by Fiesta, even at the same time that Fiesta interrupts or transforms the ordinary

Sam 23:47

You talked about that community of faith that that sort of brought brought out this visual Fiesta, you know, what might Fiesta look like, for it for any community of faith?

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 24:00

I think for the community of faith, to keep Fiesta you have to do so by embracing extravagance that extravagance does not mean simply conspicuous consumption. And this is where we have to be careful

and distinguish how we think of Fiesta in a context like ours in for so many of us united states of overabundance and that, whom do you invite to the Fiesta? One of the things i i Love, for example, we're visiting and working with Methodist communities in the US and also in Latin America. So many times for example, when I would visit homes of Methodist people in El Salvador, they would have in their home, stacks of plastic chairs. Extra If that are not used just in a corner, then because you never know who's going to show up. And so they're they're anticipating that you don't know who's going to show up for a fiesta. And so there's an extravagance of hospitality and of opening the doors, that is important for Fiesta to come into its own. And that is one that that then therefore, blurs lines, opens, doors, borders, transcending of the kind of people who gather for Fiesta, not just people like us, it's people like us, and others, because we have a very diverse, rich family. And so embracing Fiesta means embracing also this extravagant hospitality, extravagance in our language. Also, I think that this is the aspect that our liturgy actually captures, well, the language of the Lord's Supper, particularly in the, in the rituals that our denomination has with wooden table, in remembering great acts of God and, and, and the, in the presence of Christ. And on the on the night when he was betrayed and the calling of the Holy Spirit and the pointing towards the day of the final banquet or today of will of the great fiesta. That Lang extravagance of that language is intrinsic to the character of fiesta. Now, the the aspect of the meal where it seems like it's a little bit of bread and a little bit of juice, that's not very Fiesta like on except for the eyes to face. Because for the eyes of faith, that is not just that, it is actually our Lord, and encounter with our Lord's body and blood. So that which is the Fiesta of fiestas, that that word that that wedding banquet of the Lamb. So, it is very much an anticipation, and living in anticipation living in extravagant hospitality. The sense of this was a public event. All these things are ingredients for fiesta. And I was, I would say that for the Methodist people in particular to do so with the marginalized **is key** is going to be key to transforming our celebrations, from parties and from closed affairs into their coming into their own Fiesta character.

Sam 27:30

So what might Fiesta look like for a follower of Christ, you know, an individual.

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 27:37

For a person, it would mean being attuned to how the ordinary celebrations of that we experience in life can point us to the final Fiesta and prepare us for fiestas along the way. And that's why I think Fiesta offers healing as well, that life is worth living. Even today, even in conditions of scarcity and conditions of marginality. For John Wesley, holiness and happiness went together. And he spoke of for example of the Beatitudes as the complete art of happiness. And so that when John Wesley says there's no religion, but social religion, so no holiness, but social holiness, we could also say that there is no religion but joyful religion, and no holiness, but a joyful, happy holiness. And I think that that aspect of joy and holiness is also a way in which Fiesta can offer healing gift for our communities, where sometimes there's very little joy whether it be in our worship, or whether it be in our lives, and that Fiesta can real by reorienting us to our final Fiesta and dissipating that in small ways here below. offer healing that affirms the dignity of life now, even as it also points to life abundant in the world to come. Hmm,

Sam 30:01

good. Okay, let's talk about your last, your last healing gift which is forgiveness?

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 30:08

Well, forgiveness follows Fiesta or maybe Fiesta falls forgiveness. Our current predicament is one of broken relations, we are in disharmony in, we are at odds with ourselves, with our neighbors, with the creation and with the Creator. And forgiveness and reconciliation, concern the restoration of these broken relations, and their elevation to new plane. And forgiveness then offers healing from these broken relations and the consequences from these broken relations. And it's a gift of God. First of all, there is a liturgy Lenten liturgy, in Orthodox churches, Eastern Orthodox churches, where the each person approaches the other and says, to the other person, I would say to you, forgive me, I'm a sinner. And you would say to me, God forgives you. And I forgive you. And I participated in the write like that recently with Christians in Taiwan. And it was powerful minder of how forgiveness is intrinsic to the character of the Christian. We enter into Christian community through forgiveness, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and we are remaining in communion through forgiveness, because we offend each other. I think of the parable of the prodigal son, and how the prodigal son is embraced by the father when the product will returns home in the fall, and the prodigal has a confession of sin that he'd rehearsed, ready to offer to the Father. And the father doesn't wait for the confession of sin simply embraces and forgives, the father can already read the confession in the face of a son. And then there is a fiesta. And the elder son is frustrated and offended by the Fiesta. But Father says we had to celebrate, we had to have a fiesta. Because your brother was dead. And now he's alive. And to me, that's a beautiful depiction of the connection of forgiveness, and Fiesta. And, and how it was that it was the Fiesta that disrupt that upset the older brother, but also that the father's insistence that there needed to be fiesta. Because forgiveness had already been extended. And so I think of how there's going to be this book, no future without forgiveness. And I think that's so important. It's so significant. And that's significant for us, United Methodist as well given our current moment, but also there's no no forgiveness, without fiesta. That's what we see in those parables in Luke 15, that when the last is found, there is fiesta. And so fears so the Fiesta is a way of affirming that forgiveness has happened, and that new relationships have been are possible through the restoration of broken relationships.

Sam 40:01

Yes. Okay, so with all these gifts in mind, family, faith, Fiesta and forgiveness, where are you seeing glimpses of hope, or new creation right now.

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 40:15

I see them many places, one level there's in, in our northern hemisphere, whispering the flowering of trees, the beauty of the surroundings. It's new life. It's ordinary, it's cyclical. And yet, there is more to it than that there are depths to the cycles that point to new creation. I see it in earlier this week, we had admitted students, they, and we had over 100 prospective students. I'm thinking I'm looking at this room full of people thinking they could be doing other things. They could be studying some other discipline, law and medicine, and we're business to do something else. And here they are pursuing ministry. That's not a common path today. And so to me, that's a sign that the spirit is still calling it a sign of new creation. I see it in the fact that next year 2025, will be the 1700 anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. And with that, the birth of nice the Nicene Creed, that the fact that we celebrate Easter when we do that was settled on that council. And so without the opportunity to unite with Christians all around and saying, We believe we may have many differences. But we also have some commonalities. And maybe

when it's time to focus on what binds us together as as Christians as followers of Christ, and that we have this incredible opportunity to do so. So I see possibilities there for new creation. And as I mentioned, being together with Christians in Taiwan, from countries that are in conflict with each other. Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and extending forgiveness to each other. That's for me signs of new creation. So they're all around it's I think, this is where the gift of faith comes in. For those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear the science of new creation are overly abundant. God is not miserly in giving us signs. It simply requires the eyes to see.

Sam 42:58

That's good. Okay, we have three questions love for you. They're sort of called lightning round. So you don't have to expound too much. But you can. You just said some things that are exciting you about ministry. But tell us what else most excites you about ministry right now.

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 43:16

I believe that we are in living in the fullness of time that we are in a season of Kairos. of density of events that can be overwhelming. But it's not it is not doom scrolling. It is not bad news, simply that there's good news in our time.

Sam 43:44

Good. Number two, what are you learning right now?

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 43:49

What I'm learning always is learning to dream. This is a sense of being in the fullness of time of being living, living after Pentecost. And you're when you're young, you'll see visions and you're all children dreams. I guess I'm moving now more towards the dreaming of dreams and seeing a vision. And so learning to dream, and that this is a time for dreaming. Not a time for nightmares. There are many horrible things in the world around us. Of course there are I know that. And that is precisely our commitment as Christians to dream for those who do not dream because there are so many nightmares in the world. And so I I've learned to dream. That's what I'm learning to do.

Sam 44:48

Okay, number three, last one. Finish this sentence. Church is good

Edgardo Colón-Emeric 44:56

news.

Sam 45:00

Amen. All right, we want to thank you Dr. Edgardo. We're so grateful for your time and just your vision of family faith, Fiesta and forgiveness. If you are listening and you would like to learn more about anything that we've discussed today, visit our table talk website at [TWK umc.org/table talk](https://www.twkumc.org/table-talk). And if you'd like to add to our conversation, we would love to hear from you. Email us at [table dot talk at T Wk umc.org](mailto:tabletalk@twkumc.org). Thank you for listening