Amanda Tyler and Dr. Walter Brueggemann discuss the theological dangers of Christian nationalism, including what we can learn from the prophets, the importance of the narrative of the crucifixion and resurrection, and what the Bible says about oppression, hope, truth, and power.

1. At 6:19, Dr. Brueggemann states, “Truth and power always have a tense, ambiguous relationship, but I have come to think that truth characteristically arises from below. And any time truth is forced upon us top down, it is distorted by the assumption and the exercise of power. ... Jesus is an exact embodiment of truth from below.” What are examples where we see Jesus embodying the “truth from below” concept? What implications does this concept have for us in terms of whose voices we listen to in our community, specifically when trying to learn about the effects of oppression or Christian nationalism?

2. In discussing Christian leaders today who are trying to be political power brokers, Dr. Brueggemann warns (8:17), “When our claims for Gospel Truth are attached to political and economic power, they are inevitably distorted and designed to maintain the privilege of the status quo ... Those of us who are entrusted with the Gospel are indeed entrusted with a critical edge that continues to point out the way in which power depends upon injustice for its maintenance of privilege.” When, in our history, have you seen Christian leaders trying to act as power brokers in politics? Do you agree with Dr. Brueggemann’s argument that those aligned with power lose the “subversive edge” of the Gospel? How does power depend on injustice to maintain itself? What implications does his reflection have for our own political engagement?

3. According to Dr. Brueggemann, the Old Testament is filled with stories about the intersection of religion and nationalism where political leaders are filled with “arrogant power that imagines that it is religiously legitimated” (13:54). He cites the story of Nebuchadnezzar (13:37) as such an example of the downfall of a prideful, unsustainable ruler whose Babylonian empire fails with its idolatrous religious ideology. He also describes the important role prophets played in calling out these rulers who believed they were not accountable to the Creator God. What lessons should these stories of biblical downfall try to teach Christians today? How can we be more like the prophets in our context?

4. A chief danger of Christian nationalism to Dr. Brueggemann is that it “makes God a captive and [it] domesticates God” and leads us into a politics of despair, in which we believe nothing good can happen (15:27). However, Dr. Brueggemann also states (16:29), “What the freedom of the Gospel God does is to permit us to imagine that there is hope and possibility that we will fashion new policies and new relationships that are beyond anyone’s particular vested interest.” What do you think Dr. Brueggemann means when he says Christian nationalism holds captive
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and “domesticates” God? When reflecting on these two ideas — the despair that comes from a domesticated God and the hope that comes from the Gospel God — which do you think has permeated your community the most? Why?

One of Dr. Brueggemann’s most passionate theological arguments in the podcast is around the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection narratives (17:49). To him, Easter Sunday morning shows that the power of the Roman Empire was superseded by God’s power and that any nation or any empire has its limits and cannot defeat God’s intention for an alternative way in the world. He argues that too often we privatize the resurrection as a private, magic event rather than acknowledge the powerful public event it was in order to authorize our privilege, justify our greed, and adopt Christian nationalist views. By ignoring the powerful lessons of the public resurrection, Dr. Brueggemann argues we are now witnessing ourselves becoming devoured by greed that is grounded in fear and despair. How does Dr. Brueggemann’s framing of the resurrection differ or align with what you were taught? What lessons do you think the resurrection has to teach us about power? What would you say in response to his analysis of the greed we are witnessing today?

Dr. Brueggemann offers many ways we can speak truth to power and speak out against Christian nationalism (21:40). He argues for efforts to reform the church so that the church becomes a place of truth-speaking and also encourages us to be politically active, protest in the streets, and “perform the truth” in whatever ways we are called and have the courage to do. What is one way you can speak truth to power in your community? How do you hope to inspire others in your community to recognize and speak out against Christian nationalism? What questions or reflections are you leaving here with today?

IN THIS PODCAST

Amanda Tyler
Executive Director of BJC

Dr. Walter Brueggemann
Scholar, theologian, and author of more than 100 books, including *The Prophetic Imagination*; William Marcellus McPheeters professor emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary