

## **Mark Flynn, Christ United Methodist Church**

I believe these are the wrong questions to ask. And I am afraid that the common sense answer to such a question will never make it into any paper.

Questions like "Can religion provide sustainable solutions to the world's seemingly unsolvable problems, be it climate change, ongoing wars, terrorism, racial issues, etc.?" assume a religion's goal is to bring about world peace and harmony, and if they do not accomplish that, then they have failed. That is not true. The goal of religion, at least the major world religions, is to enable individuals to discover their spiritual identity (how they are tied to a spiritual world that is beyond measurement), find reconciliation and peace with that spiritual reality, learn the ways of a spiritual life, and embody its teachings in their words, actions, and thoughts. In my own tradition, Christianity, we believe that each person's identity is tied to our Creator God; our reconciliation is linked with acceptance of Jesus as Lord; and we learn and find ongoing reconciliation with God and others through the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, here and now.

Are religious people, those struggling to live a spiritual life, concerned with climate change, war, terrorism, etc.? Of course, because each of those tragedies represents a failure of understanding who we are as children of God, who others are as our brothers and sisters, and whose world this is. Each of those problems are created by people who are choosing a false answer to a problem, are driven by fear of losing something, or who do not believe that all people are valuable.

Christians want all the world to learn what it means to live out God's desires for humanity. But the goal of Christian faith is not to force change on everyone else. It is to embody a healthy spirituality in our own lives, and that is what ultimately draws people to explore their own spiritual life and embrace ways of living that differ from the world's ways (war, violence, greed).

Could Christianity or any other religion provide sustainable solutions? Of course, as could any ten year old: stop being selfish, share what you have, take care of the earth, treat people with kindness, don't take more than you need when other people don't have enough, compromise instead of fighting, etc. These are not hard concepts. Would it be nice if everyone took seriously their calling to be loving, spiritually mature people? Yes. Would it be nice if people stopped using religion (and politics, nationalism, wealth, power, etc.) to hurt others? Yes. Can religion bring world peace and harmony? Sure, but the majority of people around the world have tended to ignore the answers religions give. They have chosen to keep using the methods of war, violence, and greed...and thus, the problems that were here 2,000 years ago remain with us.