

## The Tipping Point

We have just celebrated Easter. Easter is the pivot point for all of human history. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event for human beings. Without Easter, the world as we know it would be completely different. I doubt that we can even imagine what this world would look like, if Christ's resurrection had not happened. Easter was a life-changing event for those early followers of Christ. They saw him crucified on the cross on Good Friday. They spent Saturday in loss and mourning and grief as their hopes for a new reality lay dashed in pieces on the ground. But, everything changed on Easter Sunday morning, and the world has never been the same since.

Easter was a tipping point. Easter is a moment in time when the earth shifted on its axis (figuratively) and a whole new reality was ushered in. In 2000, Malcom Gladwell wrote a best-selling book called *The Tipping Point*. He describes it this way, "The possibility of sudden change is at the center of the idea of the Tipping Point and might well be the hardest of all to accept. The expression first came into popular use in the 1970s to describe the flight to the suburbs of whites living in the older cities of the American Northeast. When the number of incoming African Americans in a particular neighborhood reached a certain point – 20 percent say – sociologists observed that the community would "tip": most of the remaining whites would leave almost immediately. The Tipping Point is the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point... We need to prepare ourselves for the possibility that sometimes big changes follow from small events, and that sometimes these changes can happen very quickly."

Gladwell goes on to say, "There is a Tipping Point for the introduction of any new technology. Sharp introduced the first low-priced fax machine in 1984, and sold about 80,000 of those machines in the United States in that first year. For the next three years, businesses slowly and steadily bought more and more faxes, until, in 1987, enough people had faxes that it made sense for everyone to get a fax. 1987 was the fax machine Tipping Point. 1,000,000 machines were sold that year, and by 1989, 2,000,000 machines had gone into operation. Cell phones have followed the same trajectory. Cell phones slowly grew through the 1990s, until the technology hit a Tipping Point in 1998, and suddenly everyone had a cell phone. We are all, at heart, gradualists, our expectations set by the steady passage of time. But, the world of the Tipping Point is a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is – contrary to all our expectations – a certainty."

I believe the Tipping Point is a helpful way to describe the world we are living in today. New ideas, technologies, policies, and products get introduced. They grow slowly for a few years, and then all of a sudden they reach a critical mass and society tips into a new reality. More and more, we are dealing with discontinuous change. The unexpected is becoming the expected. The unthinkable is becoming the thinkable. And it is tipping us into a strange new world that doesn't always feel comfortable and familiar.

But, God is alive and well in the midst of all of this. Part of the Easter story is that God takes the terrible things of the world (the crucifixion) and surprises us by working in

them to tip us into a wonderful new reality, that we have not yet imagined (the resurrection). This is part of the missional change process that congregations go through. Churches that enter into an intentional journey of missional life, will find that it often takes three years (sometimes longer) of slow conversations before the congregation reaches its Tipping Point, and becomes a different kind of faith community. God is doing the same thing in denominations that God is doing in congregations. In the same way, if a denomination enters into an intentional journey of missional life, it will often take years of slow conversations before it reaches its tipping point, and becomes a different kind of denomination.

What's hard for us is that we have been raised in a fast food culture that wants to see results now. That's not going to happen. We celebrate people and groups who are "overnight successes", while ignoring the years of hard work that took place underground and behind the scenes before they hit their Tipping Point. What's hard for us is that there is no grand vision leading up to the Tipping Point. What's hard for us is that there is no strategic plan to lead us through the build-up period. What's hard for us is the only way to get to the Tipping Point in our churches and ministries is to walk by faith, not by sight. It requires a more intentional discerning of what God is up to in our neighborhoods. It requires a more conscientious listening to the people around us, to pick up clues about what Jesus Christ is doing in their lives. It requires the fruit of the Spirit –love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.

Some people think the church is going to tip into something bad. I disagree. I believe the story of Easter is that God surprises us. When we think all is lost, and we've been defeated, and there's nothing left to live for, God surprises us. The world that we thought would tip into something bad has tipped into something good. The unexpected becomes the expected. The critical mass that we thought we would never reach, suddenly emerges as if "out of the blue".

We are on a journey with Jesus. He is walking beside us every day, holding our hand, and giving us courage and confidence. Easter is a story that surprises us. Easter is a new reality that nobody of that time saw coming. Easter was a tipping point, that was three years in the making, but seemed to emerge as if overnight. We live in the same kind of world, with the same faithful Savior, walking by our side. Do not be afraid. Do not be scared. And don't go it alone. God has given us the church – a community of Christ's followers – to tip our world into a new reality. It has already begun. It is already happening. It is emerging and rising up. It's the story of Easter – The Tipping Point that was, and continues to repeat itself, time and time again. To God be the glory.

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