Book Notes - *Rabbi Steven Rubenstein*

The Christians – Lucas Hnath

Even though I knew that a friend had ordered it for me, it was still a bit funny to open the package to find *The Christians* a play written by Lucas Hnath.

Even though I read quite a bit of fiction, I feel as though I haven't read a play in quite some time. Hnath does a good job setting the background of the play and he makes it easy to imagine the events unfolding on stage. The truth is, the real beauty is right in the dialogue. I think it would be powerful simply to experience the play as a dramatic reading. With just a few sustained voices in the play, the emotion and the inner turmoil of the characters is easily felt.

My friend sent me the play after a brief conversation about the challenges within the synagogue world (and the Jewish community generally) when it comes to discussing controversial issues. Our conversation was focused on the politics of the day. As it turns out, *The Christians* turns, not on politics, but on theology.

While the title of the play has no question mark, we might think of the play's theme like this – What does it take to be a real Christian and what happens when people of the same faith disagree about a core issue? The play hinges on one particular pastor's realization that he no longer believes a key element of the theology that he has been preaching for many years. More to the point, the play is about what happens when he chooses to share his realization and to try to have the whole congregation change with him. The interactions between the pastor and a series of others within the church – his assistant pastor, congregants, and (perhaps most emotional) with his wife is dramatic.

As a Jew, the two sides of the theological coin were not critical to me. But Hnath writes this story so that we can in on the elements which can speak to

any reader --- the way a person's attitude changes over time, how they experience and share these changes with those closest to them and even with their community, and the dissonance and pain that this sort of change can cause.