

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST in SIMI VALLEY
Second Sunday After Epiphany - January 18, 2004
Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday - Just Peace Sunday
Anne G. Cohen

Matthew 8:23-27

For Our Reflection:

RACE: an identity attributed to individuals based on physical ancestry.

CULTURE: an identity attributed to settings based on the way people live and interact in those settings.

ETHNICITY: race + culture

ALL churches are ethnic churches.

- Russell Yee, Chinese-American, Fuller Seminary Professor of Worship

This was a dialogue sermon with Lutie Lee, a member of the UCC in Simi, a teaching professional, about to finish her doctorate in Christian Education, who grew up in an economically privileged home in the Philippines but has encountered challenges in the US due to her race and gender. What follows are my lead into the conversation and some of my contributions to the conversation which would be impossible to reconstruct. But we talked about the difficulties of being a faithful person as a privileged person AND as an oppressed person. There are no simple answers, but we agreed that the dialogue was a meaningful beginning.

Perspectives on Multiculturalism

"Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"

The winds are raging, the times are changing, the seas are churning and the boat is sinking.

"Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"

You SAID you wanted to follow me. You SAID you wanted to follow Messiah and do God's work and bring in the KINGDOM OF GOD. You SAID you were ready for this.

NOW, in the face of a little life-threatening chaos, you're questioning my abilities? Suspicious of my intentions? Doubting the power of God to bring order out of confusion? What have you been giving me for the last year, the last month, the last few hours -lip service?

"...You of little faith..."

I don't know about you but, personally, I'm afraid of any number of

things - including social upheaval, terrorism and death. But I still consider myself a person of faith and I resent the accusation that I am only giving God lip service IF I AM AFRAID.

I live my life as faithfully as anyone. I grew up knowing that I was born white and middle-class in America - and that these things required repentance and restitution. I knew from the first day of Kindergarten that I was born racist and had to work hard at overcoming my natural tendencies to see skin color and make judgments based on that alone.

I knew that I was born entitled. If I wanted something badly enough and worked hard enough and had faith in the fairness of life - I could get it, achieve it, be it. And I learned that my sense of entitlement to everything that sustains life and makes it interesting was part of the problem, part of my privilege, something that had to be humbled, leveled, set aside so that others could have access to food, water and hope.

My people are responsible for colonization and imperialism. My people are responsible for genocide and slavery. My people are responsible for developing weapons of mass destruction and the pillage of Central America's natural resources and the internment of Japanese Americans and the failure of the social safety net and the destruction of the environment.

That's a lot of weight to grow up with.

[Lutie broke in here and asked if I was sincere or giving lip-service. I assured her that I was sincere and she asked to hear more.]

I've been working hard all my life to NOT be a racist, to repair social and ecological damage, to stop wars, to understand cultures other than mine, to share the wealth and power I seem to have been handed at birth, to NOT hurt anyone's feelings or self-esteem, to trust that God is working all of this out in God's own sweet time. I claim to be a woman of faith - and I admit publicly to being a racist because its politically correct to claim white, middle-class guilt.

But there is an underlying resentment in me that no matter what I do - as a white girl in America - I will never be judged by the content of my character by most people of color. There is nothing I can do to make up for all the wrongs of my race and culture.

[Lutie spoke at length here and told some personal stories. The rest of what is written wasn't read - but some of the points were made during our conversation.]

And, to make it worse, there has been and continues to be a huge gap between what I SAY I believe - and what I'm willing to risk, what I'm willing to change about my life and my choices. I WANT what I have and I WANT to think well of myself. I actually HAVE some thoughts and behaviors that I should feel guilty about. So I have to take the Gospel challenge seriously. Am I giving God lip service? Am I promoting multiculturalism from the head while remaining too afraid to practice it from the heart in real life?

I actually have some anxiety about what Lutie has to say this morning - because I'm afraid that I'll be forced to change my self-congratulatory image of myself as a LIBERAL white girl. I told Lutie to be honest - and now I'm wondering if that was such a great idea - Oh me of little faith!

Lutie asked me to speak first this morning. As a white person in a white privileged society, I usually get to speak first.

As a minister in a Christian worship service, I usually get to preach first.

As a straight person in a straight privileged society I get to speak out loud and clear - with the closet door wide open.

As a middle-class person in America I get to be part of the on-going conversation and feel like I have some amount of influence.

As a woman of my particular culture in the United States of America in the year 2004 - I don't have to wear a veil or ask permission or keep my opinions to myself (even though I do spend some time defending my credibility and I am careful not to walk alone at night and 2003 statistics tell us that women still earn 80 cents to the man's dollar).

Lutie asked me to speak first, but I didn't want to. I felt like I should defer to someone who doesn't usually GET to speak first. But she wanted to have the opportunity to interrupt me - coming from a culture where she would normally wait to be recognized before speaking. And if she hasn't interrupted me yet, then I'm going to take this opportunity to recognize my co-preacher for the day and ask her to please speak up and say what she has to say freely from the pulpit this morning...

[We both talked about our experience of the guilt of the privileged class. And she talked about her own insights about keeping God at the center of her life in order to deal with obstacles, including racists. I asked if we'd ever have a world where we'd "be judged by content of our character rather than the color of our skin" - and Lutie said the danger with that is becoming color blind. It's complex, but the conversation is worth it.]

Bulletin

WE GATHER FOR PRAYER AND CELEBRATION

Music for Gathering

Welcome and Perspective on the Day

Musical Preparation for Worship - A Time for Centering

+ Call to Worship United Theological Seminary, Bangalore, India
"Saranam" means "Refuge"

Many:

Saranam, Saranam, Jagadisvara (God of the universe)

Saranam, Saranam, Hridayesvari (Mother God of the heart)

Saranam, Saranam, Amada-purna (Fullness of Joy)

Saranam, Saranam, Kalyana-kari (Maker of Good)

Saranam, Saranam, Jivesvara (God of life)

Saranam, Saranam, Sarvesvari (Mother God of all beings)

Saranam, Saranam, Pramata-pita (Wise Father)

Saranam, Saranam, Karuna-mata (Compassionate Mother)

One: Let us acknowledge the pervasive presence of God
that breaks in amidst us, the children, in the togetherness
of male and female.

+ Hymn of Creation God of the Sparrow Hymnal # 32

Earth Credo (responsive) Elizabeth S. Tapia, Philippines

One: I believe in the sacredness of the earth, the integrity
of the whole creation and dignity of all people and creatures.

Many: I believe in a gracious God who created humankind -
male and female, and gave them the responsibility to take care
of the earth. We need to care.

One: I believe we human beings have failed God and ourselves.
In the name of greed and development we have dominated the earth.

Many: The people and creatures destroyed the forest, polluted
the air, river and seas and have sacrificed the future of our children.
We need to repent.

One: I believe that when we destroy the earth we eventually
destroy ourselves. We must protect and preserve the earth not
only for our own survival but for the sake of our mother earth.

The time to change is now.

Many: I believe we need to change our ways, values, lifestyle and ways of relating with creation.

One: Repent, fast and pray.

Many: Consume less, waste not.

One: Work for justice and peace.

Many: We should not covet our neighbors' timber butterflies, white sand beaches, nearly extinct animals nor cheap labor.

One: We should not oppress children, indigenous people, women, the homeless, refugees and victims of war.

Many: We need to live in the sense of people and creation. For I believe in the interwovenness of life.

One: Creator and Creatures.

Many: Cosmic and Individual.

One: West, North, East, South. Rest and Prayer.

Many: Food and Freedom. Theology and Ecology.

One: I therefore commit myself, together with you, to take care for mother earth.

Many: To advocate for peace and justice

One: To choose life.

Many: These things I believe. Amen.

Our Common Prayer (unison) from the Maori Anglican Liturgy

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven;
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the people of the earth!

With the bread we need today, feed us.
In the hurts we inflict on one another, forgive us.
In the time of temptation and test, strengthen us.
>From trials too great to endure, spare us.
>From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For your reign is in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. Amen.

Time for Silent Reflection

One: My soul waits in silence.

All: God is my rock and my fortress. I will be at peace.

Silent Reflection

The Assurance of Good News (unison) Kate Compston, England

God makes peace within us:

we claim this healing, in faith and hope.

Sung Response "Hallelujah. God be praised!" (CSB #5 Refrain)

WE TEACH, REFLECT AND PROCLAIM

Conversation with Our Children To Be a Drum by Evelyn Coleman

Reading from the Christian Gospels Matthew 88:23-27

Dialogue Sermon Perspectives on Multiculturalism
Lutie Lee & Anne Cohen

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S INVITATION

Intercessions, Celebrations and Encouragements

Call to Prayer Be still and know that I am God Hymnal #
743

Time for Silence

Our Joys and Concerns and an Offering of Prayer

Sung Response I Have A Dream by Ella Rose Halloran

words by Martin Luther King

Bob Erickson, vocal * Rebecca Dekker, piano

We Offer Our Gifts So That Our Lives May Be Our Prayer
Offertory

Prayer of Thanksgiving Amado Nervo, Central America

Shepherd, I bless you for what you give me.
If nothing you give me, I also do bless you.
I follow you laughing, through roses and thorns;
Through brambles and thistles, I joyously follow.

With you when there's plenty, with you when I want
Still always with you.

+ Commissioning Hymn We Are Not Our Own Hymnal # 564

+ Commissioning (unison)

The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

Go forth, my people, go and pray further off,
love will be your song and life your celebration.
Go, you are the house of God,
stones cut according to the measure of God's love.
You are awaited, my people, and I declare to you,
Word of God. I am going with you.

+ Sung Response (we gather in some semblance of a circle)
Song from Ghana

+ Postlude

WORSHIP NOTES

Call to Worship from United Theological Seminary, Bangalore, India, is
found in Gifts of Many Cultures Ed. by Maren Tirabassi and Kathy Eddy
(p.11)

Earth Credo by Elizabeth S. Tapia, Philippines, Ibid. (p.114-15)

The Assurance of Good News by Kate Compston, England, Ibid. (p.14)

Prayer of Thanksgiving by Amado Nervo, Central America (Elena M. Huegel,
translator, Paraguay) Ibid. (p.21)

Commissioning by The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa,
Ibid. (p.59)