

November 6, 2011

***“See the World
Feelingly”***

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See the World Feelingly

Rev 7:9-17; I John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

All Saints A

Sermon by Sharon Rhodes-Wickett
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The world as we know it shifts and teeters every day. What we thought was true turns out not to be true. What we thought was foundational turns out to be endangered. Changing technology leaves us breathless as we try to comprehend the possibilities at our fingertips. The poor are poorer and greater in number.

At times such as these we might want to consider Shakespeare's King Lear. As age continues to erode Lear's sense of himself and his hold on his world, he stands with the blind Gloucester, out on a heath, and asks, "How do you see the world?" Gloucester responds, "I see it feelingly."

I think Shakespeare's words bring wisdom to us today: To see the world feelingly... for it seems to be sorely lacking.

I once commented to a friend that I thought the more scarce resources were perceived, (especially money) that the meaner people seem to get. He said, "oh yes, it's the 'Donner Party' effect. When times are tough we turn on each other." Meanness and intolerance flourish and we unleash our fear on one another. I see it everywhere as you may also. If we feel threatened we fabricate more enemies than really exist.

We who are Christian, or who are thinking about being Christian, can counter hurtful meanness by seeing the world feelingly.

Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount is an example of seeing the world feelingly. These beatitudes run counter to the culture, to common sensibilities of first century Palestine as well as the 21st Century world.

Each category of those who are blessed are those who are marginalized: the poor in spirit; those who mourn; the meek; the merciful; pure in heart; the peacemakers, the persecuted. These are not the powerful of the world. These are the vulnerable. These are the ones who live in the world feelingly.

Rather than devour them with disdain, Jesus says they are blessed. Our attitudes and policies do not convey any sense of blessing. Rather we tend to blame them.

The cross of Jesus Christ conveys radical, new, and transforming information about God-- information that must change forever how we relate to one another.

Tari Lennon observes, "The Christ of God, 'Christ crucified,' a crucified God, discloses a God participant with us, a God in whom we must participate, a God who is weak by worldly calculations of strength - and silly by intellectual standards of smart.

"The religious concerns of the tradition are not rejected ... just gathered up and faced in a new direction. Righteousness, mercy, peace--they are still important, but to be realized now, in a new way. But the new way is not simply the old way, it is a bigger way. The route to a fuller relationship with God is through a more inclusive and expansive relationship with each other and the sure and certain knowledge that every actual entity gives rise to every other actual entity and that they are all pervaded by the Divine Life. Nothing can be scoffed at, no one should be overlooked, and everything can be reworked and redone to divine ends." ⁱ

Last night was the annual banquet for The Council on American-Islamic Relations, held in a hotel in Anaheim. Last year a couple of carloads of us attended the event. I was unable to attend this year. I had previously gone to a training meeting for Interfaith Witnesses. We are committed to stand with those who are being denied their right to religious assembly. It is most needed by the Muslim community right now since there are protests in various places in the country against Islamic Centers or Mosques being built, including Ontario.

I received an email last night telling about what the Interfaith Witnesses observed at the banquet: "There was a group of noisy protesters at the front entrance of the hotel. They were comprised of about ten men wearing black leather jackets that said, "Bikers for Christ" and about ten other folks waving US and Israeli flags.

"There is a small strip of public sidewalk where they had set up with a megaphone and they were taking turns yelling horrible, truly obscene things at the hotel guests, the Muslims arriving for the banquet, and at us.

"Some of them went on long tirades against Islam, drawing on every kind of stereotype you can imagine. Others ridiculed Muslim dress, beliefs, and tenets, invoking all the same tired misinformation about how our nation is falling under shari'a law, women will have to cover their heads, that the hotel is occupied by Hamas, and a few others too obscene to repeat (I heard one of their men ask a woman in our group if she liked to be raped). We stood in silent witness."

In particular she wrote about a friend of mine who was there, retired UM pastor Rev. Tom Reinhart-Marean: "He really took a figurative beating tonight. These so-called Christian protesters saw Tom's collar and they just descended on him in the most hateful way. It broke my heart to see this dear, loving, deeply faithful man being called names and taunted by such hate-filled people."

- Bless you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. -

Today members of the Growing Christian class are taking the train to LA to surround Barbara Boxer's office to send the message, "don't allow the Tar Sands Pipeline to be built!"

- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. -

These Beatitudes are not platitudes for the 1st Century. They are a way to be faithful in the 221st century. They remind us of our calling. They remind us of that which binds us one to another.

To look at the world feelingly is to feel the pain of creation groaning under the weight of our over-consumption.

To look at the world feelingly is to stand in solidarity with our Muslim sisters and brothers as they are persecuted for their religion.

It is to see, with compassion, those hovering around the edges of society. It is to reject stereotypes and caricatures of any people as dehumanizing.

Joan D. Chittister in *A Passion for Life* writes, "For centuries the church has confronted the human community with role models of greatness. We call them saints when what we really often mean to say is 'icon,' 'star,' 'hero,' ones so possessed by an internal vision of divine goodness that they give us a glimpse of the face of God in the center of the human. They give us a taste of the possibilities of greatness in ourselves."

Yes, that's what Saints do for us. That's what Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 does. We begin to get a taste of the possibilities of greatness in ourselves and for the world.

I like what Mother Teresa wrote when she said, "Keep in mind that our community is not composed of those who are already saints, but of those who are trying to become saints. Therefore let us be extremely patient with each other's faults and failures." ⁱⁱ

We are all saints in the making and we need each other to remind us of that. Being a saint isn't being perfect it's trying to live the Beatitudes in the here and now. It is seeing the world feelingly.

As one poet put it:

*We are simply asked
to make gentle our bruised world
to tame its savageness
to be compassionate of all
including one's self
then, with the time left over
to repeat the ancient tale
and go the way of God's foolish ones.* ⁱⁱⁱ

Our world needs such foolish saints, who live in God's world feelingly.

In that spirit we remember the members of this congregation who died since last All Saints Day. As a name is read, an acolyte will place on our tree of life a leaf with the deceased's name on it. This part of the tree will join the rest of it in the Narthex where you can remember loved ones by later placing leaves on the trees as well. This was all beautifully created by Melanie Little.

Now we sing, "Jesus, Remember me"

ⁱ By Tari Lennon www.processandfaith.org January 30, 2005

ⁱⁱ quoted in *No Greater Love* edited by Becky Benenate and Joseph Durepos, www.spiritualityhealth.com

ⁱⁱⁱ This poem has been attributed to anonymous, Jim Strathdee (who set it to music), Sr. Mary Evelyn Jegen http://www.newconversations.net/gkh_intro.htm, Peter Byrne, SJ <http://willhumes.net/2008/09/08/we-are-simply-asked/>,