

Snapshots – Part 2

From the Bible: Luke 4: 17-19 and Matthew 5: 13-16

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August 8, 1010

You may have seen in the paper or heard on the news that federal court judge Vaughn Walker ruled that Proposition 8 which banned gay marriage in California is unconstitutional. As I read about the decision, one article quoted a Christian pastor, the only religious leader mentioned, as saying, “This decision will cause Christians, who otherwise might be silent, to rise up in opposition.” I cringed when I read that. Not just because I hold a different position, but because of the way it portrays all Christians. What it says to so many others about Christianity and organized religion is that we are more narrow-minded than open-minded and that we are **against** more than we are **for**. I resonate with the sentiments expressed in a comment made by one young Presbyterian at the Bi-annual meeting of Presbyterians that concluded about a month ago which also included ongoing debates about homosexuality. He said, “Presbyterians have been fighting about this longer than I have been alive.”

I...we...have been a part of that “fight” for many of those years and I know it is important...

But I wonder...

Is that what we are to be known for?

Is that best we can do?

So, with that introduction and background...a couple of snapshots for you to think about.

Snapshot #1

From a publication by the Alban Institute – a church research and study organization

“The November 2009 issue of *The Week* featured a story “Losing Our Religion,” that focused on the rapidly growing numbers of the religiously unaffiliated in the United States, the so called *Nones* (demographics in our area place that number at nearly 40%) and asked if organized religion is fading. Younger than the general population, many *Nones* believe in God yet are skeptical about organized religion. The article quotes recent statistics suggesting that if this trend continues, cohorts of nonreligious young people will replace older religious people and account for one-quarter of the American population. Another recent article in *USA Today* concluded that young adults born in the 1980s and 1990s, approximately 72 million people, want to make an impact and are socially-conscious yet do not relate to traditional institutional structures. A decreasing number of these young adults view churches as places to make a difference or to develop their leadership skills.”

Snapshot #2

From Sojournmail – An online newsletter from the Sojourners Community

The background is that several months ago Fox News commentator, Glenn Beck, urged all Christians who attend churches that spoke about social justice to leave those churches because those congregations were really promoting “secular humanism” at best, and Marxism at worst. Mr. Beck attacked Jim Wallis, the founder of the Sojourners Community and the editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine, in particular. So when Jim Wallis, whom I have met on several occasions, was invited to speak at a youth gathering in Wisconsin a firestorm erupted. Jim’s article describes what happened this way:

“A local Christian radio station, which had always supported [the youth conference], and a local pastor started circulating attacks against me, suggesting that I was a communist, a deceiver, and, worst of all, an advisor to President Obama. My favorite was that I was an “avowed Marxist” and that any young person that heard me would be in “spiritual peril.” Finally, I got to speak to the young people, which was the reason I came [to Wisconsin] in the first place. I told them that I came because of them and the hope their generation provides to me. And that I liked the title of the talk I was to give: “The Call to Jesus and his Kingdom of Justice.” So that’s what I talked about to a very enthusiastic response from the thousands of young people who were there – the crowd made even larger because of the controversy, of course.

I said that when we have controversy and conflict in the church and speak badly of one another as Christians, it actually turns people away from Christ. And I said what unites us is not our different cultures, nationalities, or political views. What unites us is the gospel of Jesus and his kingdom, and their job as a new generation was to make that clear. When I quoted Jesus’ opening sermon at Nazareth and concluded that “any gospel that isn’t good news to the poor is not the gospel of Jesus Christ,” they all cheered.

Snapshot #3

Bedford Presbyterian Church last Sunday

Our worship last week was led by a group of young adults – campers and counselors from Holmes/The Presbyterian Center. A group probably not all that different from the group of young adults who gathered to hear Jim Wallis speak in Wisconsin earlier this summer. For those of you who were here, do you remember what was on the t-shirts that they all wore?

- *Not Take the Bible Literally*
- *Not Are you Straight or Gay*
- *Not Do You Go to Church Last Sunday*
- *Not Have You Taken Jesus as Your Personal Lord and Savior*
- *Not Are You Saved?*

But...

Be A Hero.

Be A Hero.

Snapshot #4

Bread and Wine

The oldest and most important symbols in Christianity

The language we use when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper is often heard as the language of sacrifice. Jesus gave his life to save us. But, again, I wonder...

I grew up with that language.

I understand the history and the meaning of that language.

But I don’t believe it anymore.

I don’t think that is what Jesus meant or was saying when he gathered for what turned out to be his final meal with his best friends.

The bread broken.

Body broken.

Given to you.

Was the bread of the Passover.

Bread for the journey.

Sustenance and strength for the work that came next.

And, cup poured.

Blood shed.

Take and drink.

It is not his sacrificial blood that Jesus was speaking about.

It was what, in Hebrew, is called *nephish hyah*...the essence of who one is that flows through you like your blood...with your blood.

That is what I think Jesus passed on to his disciples.

The essence of who he was so that they could...

- Be like him.
- Do what he did.
- Preach what he preached.
- Care for those who were too often overlooked or forgotten or in need like he did.
- Heal those who were broken in all the ways that life and world can break people.

That is what Jesus gave to them.

So that when they got up from that table and went out into the world.

When they experienced resurrection on the far side of crucifixion **they** could say the words that Jesus read from the scriptures as he began his ministry...

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;

Because God has appointed me...

To bring good news to the poor;

Release to the captive;

Recovery of sight to the blind;

And to let the oppressed go free.

Maybe that is who we are called to be and what we are called do.

Your life may be the only gospel some people ever read.

All are invited to share bread and cup.

All are called to become like Jesus.

Let us pray,

May the common become holy...again.

May the ordinary become tinged with the sacred...again.

Not just bread and wine, but our lives.

And with this bread and this cup, may we be turned again towards Your promised Kingdom meant for us and for all.

Amen.