

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship
January 30, 2011
Anita Rediger

Simply, Hopefully, Together

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

--MC USA Vision Statement 1995

What a great invitation! God calls to us to be followers of Jesus...At other times, we are invited to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We hear words which encourage us to share the Gospel or to spread the Gospel... Yes... it sounds so important...it is important God is calling us....but what exactly does that mean? What is it actually that we are supposed to share or spread?

As I prepared for my ordination interview with the Central District Conference Ministerial Committee, I remember asking myself, "how would I describe 'the Gospel?'" What exactly is this Gospel that we talk about so freely and frequently? What do we mean when we say we are proclaiming the "Good News" of Jesus? If we did a "person-on-the street" interview in downtown Berne, no doubt it would be very interesting to hear the responses to the question, "What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?" Think about it for a moment. How would you respond to a person who suddenly asked you, "What do you mean when you say 'Gospel?'"

This morning's text from Matthew is one that may be dangerously familiar to us - the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. Anabaptist believers would describe themselves as "non-creedal;" that is, not basing their foundational beliefs on an accepted written code. Yet, Anabaptist believers acknowledge the Sermon on the Mount as their primary basis for faith and life, words that come very close as being described as a "creed." You might say, Anabaptist believers understand the Beatitudes to be "Gospel!" (God's Good News)

Through the centuries of there have been two predominant interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount. There was the "monastic interpretation." The Church of the Middle Ages began to categorize believers into two sorts - those who were known as monks and nuns - that is "religious" and those who were "ordinary." It was understood that only those set apart as "religious" could actually live out the life described

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by Jesus. Being part of the “real world” would ruin any chance at that! The second interpretation was described as “the impossible ideal” – the world of the Sermon on the Mount wasn’t possible for anyone! It must be for a future far from the reality of earth. However, Anabaptist believers saw in these teachings in yet another way – not as commands which were impossible to flesh out in “the real world” but rather as promises for the “now!”

Promises for “the now”...really...? hmm....“God calls us to be followers of Jesus...growing as communities of faith so that healing and hope flow through us to the world...hmmm...

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of (the Good News) of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people...great crowds followed him...when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying...” Matt. 4:23 ff.

As Jesus sat down in the midst of the surrounding crowds, with those called his disciples nearest to him, he began to speak, saying... “The kingdom of God is like this...

In the kingdom:

- When we are depleted in spirit and soul, in the kingdom, we have a place to rest and recover
- When we’ve suffered great losses, in the kingdom, we’ll be supported and comforted
- When we accept some of the limitations of this life, in the kingdom, mysteriously life grows even richer

In the kingdom:

- When we long for God’s justice, in the kingdom ,we’ll find others who long with us
- As we care for others, in the kingdom ,we’ll discover the living Christ
- In the kingdom ,we are invited to see the things that aren’t of the kingdom with new eyes, with new understandings
- When we seek the shalom of God, in the kingdom ,we discover a wonderful sense of belonging!

This is the kingdom...of which Jesus taught and spoke.

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A couple of weeks ago, one of our group shared with me these beautifully crafted words, "For the past year and a half I have been attending Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship. I enjoy the small fellowship, open dialogue, emphasis on relationships or community and the pacifist stance." In her words, I hear description of life in the kingdom – yes! These truly are promises for "the now!" How do I know this? Well, I am describing my experience of being "church" here among you, too! I am experiencing everyone of these "blessings" as we travel together! And how I hope that you are too!

The Beatitudes are not just wishful thinking for a future blessing, and it's certainly not because we are monks or nuns! It's simple practical stuff; it's not about giving away everything we have, it simply means being generous beginning with those nearest to us. It's not about caring for everyone in the world, but about loving the person close at hand whom we find a bit "irregular!" It's not about being so saintly that people are scared of us; it's about being as real as Jesus was so that others of God's children feel welcome.

"God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace...so that the kingdom may come...on earth as it is in heaven, so that God's healing and hope can flow through us to the world!

And could it be that it isn't as complicated as we thought it must be...We seem to try to make the Sermon on the Mount elaborate, theological and complicated. What is it again that the Lord requires? In the words of the prophet I also hear the promise of the kingdom...people in the kingdom of God...

do justice,
love kindness
and walk humbly with God. That sure sounds like Jesus to me....

Last week, the Goshen College worship troupe led us in this wonderful song...

We are going. Heaven knows where we are going, but we know within.
And we'll get there. Heaven knows how we will get there, but we know
we will.

It will be hard, we know. And the road may be muddy and rough, but
we'll get there.

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Woyaya.

We're get there, that is, we'll heading to a greater realization of the kingdom already at hand...we'll get there...simply...hopefully and together...