

“Transformative Sharing”
A Communion Meditation offered by Rev. W. Dale Osborne
June 5, 2011, Binkley Baptist Church
Scriptural Text: Matthew 19: 13-22

Over sixty years ago, during World War II and immediately following, Protestant churches made appeals for relief and reconstruction. The landscape and lives of many countries had been devastated by the war. There was a sense of shared pain and grief in the world. This sensation was coupled with a shared desire to respond. In 1946, Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill, newly-elected Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, set a goal of one million dollars per year for the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief. On nationwide radio, he challenged members to raise "one million dollars in one hour." His impassioned challenge worked. During the first three years, Episcopalians raised \$3.8 million.

In 1949, church leaders from several denominations formed a committee to organize an appeal aimed at supporting the separate campaigns of American churches. While the post-war language seems a bit stilted, their joint statement in support of this effort is still remarkably contemporary:

“This nationwide united effort by America's Christians has an importance far beyond the practical goal of fund raising. For this great joint program will not only strengthen the vitally important relief and rehabilitation work of the churches overseas, but will also prove to all the world how great is the power generated when Christians unite in a common cause.”

Those humanitarian efforts begun over sixty years ago continue today in the efforts supported by your gifts to the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering. The gifts received in this offering are used today to assist relief efforts proven necessary due to natural disasters around the globe and in the United States.

The age of Twitter, Facebook and other tech media explosions has granted humans the ability to be aware of natural disasters at a faster and faster rate. The past 12 months have been bursting with powerful natural disasters. Rivers rising, tornadoes ravaging and fires burning on our soil have caused me to wonder if there will be any end to the hailstorm of havoc. From Joplin, Missouri to central and eastern NC and all the way up to Monson, MA, tornadoes have plunged people into states of fear and desperation.

Overseas in Japan, our friends are still reeling from the effects of the recent earthquakes and tsunami. The longer term outcomes caused by the accompanying nuclear disaster fills Japan and all who rely on nuclear power with dread. In Peru, Haiti and Chile families are still recovering from earthquakes.

Most recently, two devastating earthquakes struck the historic city of Lorca, in southern Spain on Wednesday, May 11. The tremors registering 4.5 and 5.2 were the biggest to hit Spain since 1956. More than 6,000 people are sleeping in tents in five emergency camps set up by the Red Cross and Ministry of Defense. 80% of the buildings in the city of 93,000 residents were damaged.

American Baptist missionaries, Carlos Bonilla and Mayra Giovanetti and their three children live about 200 miles from the epicenter of the quakes in Lorca. We have received word from them about the impact of the earthquake. “These are communities in areas of poverty and increasing migration where hope is scarce, and keeping the vitality of the church is crucial. We pray that our churches will have space for the ‘least of these’ in their hearts and in their pockets.”

When I read the information about Lorca, Spain on the American Baptist website I was shocked. The disaster struck on May 11 and I was completely oblivious to it until reading about it on June 2. That is when I knew that there had been too many natural disasters to count or keep track of. The earth is groaning, creaking and crying in so many ways. Where will it all end I thought? What can we do to help? How can anyone feel safe in this devastation?

I turned to Matthew’s gospel for a little help in this tumultuous world’s situation. It is not the assigned lectionary passage but it was the passage I needed to cope. Our portion from chapter 19 reads:

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Prior to this encounter with the children of Judea, Jesus had been busy teaching and healing in Galilee. When he came to Judea he continued to heal many who came to him seeking a touch, a blessing, a word of hope in a chaotic world. He was probably road weary and emotionally depleted due to the outpouring of affection and wisdom he had expended. When the children were brought to Jesus, his disciples tried to turn them away. They were coming to Jesus in order that his loving hands might touch them and so that he might pray with each one of them. “Let the children come to me, ...” Jesus said. Let them come and sit on my knee. Let them share their joyous hearts and minds with me. Let these little children, so innocent, so given to outbursts of glee sit by my side. Let these caregivers, even owners of the kingdom of heaven sit by my side so that we might both be blessed.

This was a word that I needed from the gospel. In the midst of chaos, in the midst of turmoil, in the pain of devastation, allow a child to enter your world. Allow a little kingdom dweller to bless your spirit and lift you up. See if Pasha or Zoe or some other beautiful gift of God is available to share a moment with you. If they are, then you too may be transformed and revived just as Jesus was blessed by the children who came to him. Marlene Dickison has been wise enough to share in this transformation experience for many decades as she taught and directed our Binkley Preschool. She took the time to surround herself with God’s precious blessings on toddling legs for daily transformations of her soul.

Further on in today’s gospel reading Jesus encounters a young person who really wants to be good, to be perfect. Jesus instructs the individual to think about giving, about sharing as a way to be transformed. You have everything you need, share it. We have everything we need, let us be transformed through sharing from our hearts and from our possessions. Let us share as we are inspired by Jesus’ sharing, a sharing that led to a new Passover and a transformation of the world.