

I'M WONDERING HOW MANY OF YOU HEARD ABOUT THE "ME TO WE" EVENT HELD IN VANCOUVER EARLIER THIS WEEK. ON TUESDAY 16,000 YOUTH FROM AROUND THE LOWER MAINLAND GATHERED AT GM PLACE TO HEAR INSPIRATIONAL AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEECHES AND PERFORMANCES BY ACTIVISTS LIKE MARC AND CRAIG KIELBURGER, MIA FARROW, JANE GOODALL, SARAH MCLACHLAN AND HH THE DALAI LAMA.

FROM ALL ACCOUNTS THE EVENT WAS LIKE A ROCK CONCERT OF GOODWILL – WITH THOUSANDS YOUTH SCREAMING AND CHEERING ON THE PRESENTERS – AND AT THE END OF THE DAY ALL THESE PUMPED UP YOUTH GOING HOME COMMITTED TO TELLING THEIR STORIES AND MAKING REAL CHANGE IN OUR WORLD. WHAT AN AMAZING AND IMPORTANT INITIATIVE IN OUR TIME.

THERE'S JUST ONE PROBLEM. APPARENTLY AT TUESDAY'S EVENT NOT ONE PRAYER WAS SAID – NOT A SINGLE HYMN SUNG – NO BENEDICTION GIVEN – NO MENTION OF JESUS.

AND SO I HAVE TAKEN IT UPON MYSELF TO WRITE A LETTER TO THE ORGANIZERS ON YOUR BEHALF TO TELL THEM THAT ALL THIS MUST STOP. WE SIMPLY CAN'T HAVE PEOPLE RUNNING AROUND DOING GOOD WORKS UNDER FALSE PRETENSES.

THIS IS CLEARLY A CASE OF IDENTITY THEFT – AND THE IDENTITY THAT HAS BEEN STOLEN – IS THE IDENTITY OF JESUS AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH!

OF COURSE I DIDN'T WRITE ANY SUCH LETTER – BUT IF WE WERE TO TAKE THIS MORNING'S GOSPEL READING AND FAST FORWARD IT INTO TODAY'S CONTEXT – WRITING A PROTEST LETTER TO THE “ME TO WE” ORGANIZERS MIGHT BE THE KIND OF THING THE DISCIPLES WOULD HAVE CONSIDERED DOING – EVEN IF SOMEONE HAD MENTIONED JESUS NAME.

“TEACHER” THE DISCIPLES SAY TO JESUS ONE DAY “WE SAW SOMEONE CASTING OUT DEMONS IN YOUR NAME” -- USING THE SAME SOURCE OF POWER AND ENERGY THAT YOU DO – “AND SO WE TRIED TO STOP HIM – BECAUSE HE WAS NOT FOLLOWING US.” HE WASN'T ONE OF US.

I'M SURE THEY WERE EXPECTING TO GET A PAT ON THE BACK FROM JESUS FOR BEING SO PROTECTIVE OF HIS MINISTRY -- BUT JESUS COULDN'T HAVE CARED LESS THAT SOMEONE ELSE WAS CASTING OUT DEMONS IN HIS NAME. “IF YOU'RE NOT AGAINST US – YOU'RE FOR US” HE SAID –AND PERHAPS WHAT HE REALLY MEANT WAS IF YOU ARE FOR US – WHAT YOU ARE REALLY FOR – IS ONE ANOTHER.

TODAY IS WHAT'S KNOWN IN THE CHURCH AS WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY. SINCE 1937 AT THE URGING OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE US – ON THE FIRST SUNDAY IN OCTOBER --CHRISTIANS AROUND THE WORLD PAUSE TO CELEBRATE THEIR UNITY IN CHRIST BY GATHERING AROUND THE COMMUNION TABLE – SETTING ASIDE OUR DIFFERENCES AND PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER.

I HAVE TO CONFESS THAT EVERY YEAR WHEN WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY ROLLS AROUND INSTEAD OF FEELING A SENSE OF JOY AT OUR UNITY WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS – I OFTEN FEEL A SENSE OF DESPAIR -- DESPAIR ABOUT ALL THAT DIVIDES US.

WHEN I WAS AT THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL I WAS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN AN ANNUAL GATHERING OF STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY WHO CAME FROM A VARIETY OF CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS. THE ONE THING THAT THE ORGANIZERS OF THIS EVENT LAMENTED EVERY YEAR WAS THAT WE COULD NEVER GATHER AROUND OUR COMMON TABLE AND SHARE COMMUNION. WITH PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS ATTENDING THE EVENT – WE COULD NEVER OFFER AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT HAPPENS AT THE TABLE THAT WOULDN'T DEEPLY OFFEND SOMEONE ELSE'S TRADITION – SO WE NEVER CELEBRATED COMMUNION.

BECAUSE OF THAT WE HAD TO FIND DIFFERENT KINDS OF RITUALS TO PARTICIPATE IN TOGETHER. ONE YEAR AT THE END OF THE CONFERENCE WE ASKED PEOPLE TO BRING SYMBOLS TO CELEBRATE AND EXPRESS WHAT THE EVENT HAD BEEN FOR THEM AND TO PLACE THOSE SYMBOLS ON THE COMMUNION TABLE.

I WILL NEVER FORGET THE SYMBOL PLACED BY ONE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC STUDENTS WHO WAS STUDYING TO BE A PRIEST – WHEN IT CAME TIME FOR HIM TO PRESENT HIS SYMBOL – HE QUIETLY MADE HIS WAY TO THE TABLE – AND WITH GREAT REVERANCE PLACED ON IT A LOAF OF SLICED WHITE BREAD WRAPPED IN A CLEAR PLASTIC BAG AND SEALED WITH A TWIST TIE.

WHEN HE PLACED THE SYMBOL – HE SPOKE OF HOW MUCH HE HAD BEEN NOURISHED BY THE RELATIONSHIPS HE HAD FORMED THAT WEEK – AND YET HOW GRIEF-STRICKEN HE WAS THAT OUR TRADITIONS HAVE TAKEN THE VERY BREAD OF LIFE – AND SEALED IT OFF FROM EACH OTHER AND FROM OUR WORLD – THROUGH OUR DOCTRINES AND OUR LOFTY STATEMENTS ABOUT WHO JESUS WAS AND WHO JESUS WASN'T – WHO COULD COME TO THE TABLE AND WHO COULDN'T -- AND HOW TO WORSHIP AND HOW NOT TO WORSHIP.

HE TALKED ABOUT HOW IN OUR ARROGANCE WE AS CHURCHES HAVE TAKEN THE BREAD OF LIFE THAT WAS GIVEN TO US IN THE EXAMPLE AND IN THE LIFE OF JESUS – AND TURNED IT INTO SOMETHING TASTELESS AND UNAPPEALING.

EARLIER THIS WEEK AS I PONDERED THE STORY OF JESUS AND THE EXORCIST WHO WAS CASTING OUT DEMONS IN JESUS' NAME WITHOUT BEING PART OF THE IN GROUP OF DISCIPLES – AND HOW THAT WAS ABSOLUTELY FINE WITH JESUS –

I SAW IN MY MIND'S EYE ONCE AGAIN THAT BAG OF SLICED WHITE BREAD PLACED ON THE COMMUNION TABLE BY MY ROMAN CATHOLIC FRIEND – I FOUND MYSELF YET AGAIN WONDERING HOW DID WE LET THIS HAPPEN? HOW HAVE WE MANAGED TO GET SO FAR AWAY FROM THE GOOD NEWS THAT JESUS BOTH PREACHED AND LIVED?

GOOD NEWS THAT SPEAKS OF COMMUNITY IN WHICH ALL ARE WELCOME – GOOD NEWS THAT SAYS IT DOESN'T MATTER WHOSE NAME YOU FEED THE HUNGRY IN OR CLOTHE THE NAKED OR HEAL THE SICK – OR RELEASE THE CAPTIVES – AS LONG AS YOU GET THE JOB DONE.

WHAT WENT WRONG? HOW DID WE GET SO FAR AWAY FROM ALL OF THAT IN OUR IDEAS ABOUT WHAT CHURCH IS ALL ABOUT...

AND THEN I REALIZED THAT THERE'S ACTUALLY A CLUE IN THE STORY AS TO HOW THAT HAPPENED—THE CLUE IS IN WHAT THE DISCIPLES HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE MAN EXORCISING DEMONS IN JESUS NAME. “WE TRIED TO STOP HIM” THEY SAY “BECAUSE HE WAS NOT FOLLOWING US.”

IT WASN'T JESUS THE EXORCIST WASN'T FOLLOWING -- IT WAS “US” HE WASN'T FOLLOWING – THE DISCIPLES – THE “IN” CROWD – THE CHURCH. HE WASN'T DOING THINGS THE WAY WE DO THEM.

BUT WHY JESUS DIDN'T CARE? –PROBABLY BECAUSE WHAT JESUS CARES ABOUT IS SERVICE—WHAT JESUS CARES ABOUT IS SEEKING JUSTICE – MAKING A DIFFERENCE – SAVING THE PLANET -- LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

JESUS DOESN'T CARE IF YOU BOW YOUR HEAD AND SAY GRACE BEFORE YOU FEED THE HUNGRY—OR WHETHER THE PEOPLE ON THE MISSION AND OUTREACH TEAM ARE OFFICIAL MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH – OR WHETHER THE PEOPLE THAT GO WITH US TO THE LOOKOUT SHELTER TO SERVE A MEAL EVER COME HERE ON A SUNDAY MORNING -- HE DOESN'T CARE IF THE PERSON IN THE PULPIT IS A WOMAN OR A MAN – MARRIED OR SINGLE – TRANSGENDERED OR TRANSEXUAL – AS LONG AS THEY'RE PREACHING THE GOSPEL FROM THEIR HEART.

HE DOESN'T CARE IF YOU'RE A PRESBYTERIAN OR BAPTIST – LUTHERAN OR CATHOLIC – BUDDHIST OR HINDU – MUSLIM OR JEW—SIKH OR WICAN OR NONE OF THE ABOVE – IF YOU HAVE A PASSION IN YOUR HEART TO SAVE THE WORLD – AND YOU PUT YOUR PASSION INTO ACTION.

ALL HE CARES ABOUT IS THAT YOU DO WHAT HE DID IN LIFE—
WHETHER YOU “BELIEVE” IN HIM OR NOT.

ON TUESDAY AFTERNOON – AFTER HH THE DALAI LAMA HAD MET WITH THE 16,000 YOUTH AT GM PLACE – HE WENT TO THE ORPHEUM THEATRE TO SPEAK TO A FEW THOUSAND LESS PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATE IN A PANEL DISCUSSION ABOUT THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MAKING PEACE IN THE WORLD. I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE ONE OF THE PEOPLE THAT HEARD HIM SPEAK.

BUT I HAVE TO CONFESS THAT AFTER THE EVENT WAS OVER I WAS FEELING QUITE CRITICAL OF THE WHOLE THING – EVEN THOUGH THE PEOPLE ON THE PANEL WERE EXTRAORDINARY HUMAN BEINGS AFFECTING CHANGE IN THE WORLD IN VERY SIGNIFICANT WAYS – I WAS DISAPPOINTED THAT THERE WASN'T MORE CANADIAN REPRESENTATION ON THE PANEL -- THERE WERE TOO MANY AMERICANS I THOUGHT.

ALTHOUGH THE DALAI LAMA WAS SPEAKING IN SUPPORT OF A MORE ACTIVE ROLE FOR WOMEN IN MAKING THE WORLD A MORE COMPASSIONATE PLACE -- I THOUGHT HE DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT FEMINISM IS ALL ABOUT.

THERE I WAS THINKING ALL THESE CRITICAL THOUGHTS -- AND THEN I READ THIS MORNING'S BIBLE READINGS AND I THOUGHT TO MYSELF -- WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME -- I'M NO DIFFERENT THAN THE DISCIPLES IN THIS STORY.

HOW QUICKLY I DISMISSED THE INCREDIBLE WORK BEING DONE TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF OTHERS BY VERY DEDICATED PEOPLE -- BECAUSE THEY WERE'NT DOING THINGS THE WAY I THOUGHT THEY SHOULD DO THEM.

HOW EASY IT WAS TO BE CRITICAL OF THOSE WHO LIVES AND WORK I KNOW LITTLE ABOUT.

HOW HARD IT IS TO GET OVER OURSELVES AND GET ON WITH THE WORK OF BEING THE CHURCH -- BEING HUMAN -- SERVING ONE ANOTHER -- TAKING CARE OF OUR PLANET.

(WE'LL LOOK FOR ANY EXCUSE FOR INACTION)

ON TUESDAY 16,000 YOUTH FROM THE LOWER MAINLAND GATHERED AT
GM PLACE AND WERE INSPIRED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.
THOSE YOUTH MAY NEVER ENTER A CHURCH OR A GUDWARA OR A
TEMPLE OR A SYNAGOGUE IN THEIR BID TO SAVE THE PLANET AND ITS
PEOPLE – BUT MAY THEY MAKE GOOD ON THE COMMITMENTS THEY
HAVE MADE THIS WEEK --AND MAY WE JOIN WITH THEM IN THEIR
ENDEAVOURS...REGARDLESS OF THEIR CREED..