



## A Note from the Pastor's Corner

Something disturbing happened at the end of our community Ash Wednesday service at the Community Church. As I was standing with the other participating Pastors greeting those who had been in attendance, a middle-aged man said to me in a fairly belligerent voice, "And what about you?" I responded, "What about me?" "Are you born-again? I don't think so because you mentioned 'mysticism' in your sermon this evening!" Not totally prepared for such a public display of rudeness, I simply said, "You're not the one I have to be concerned about, are you." Not knowing what to say, he walked away.

I found this to be abrasive. But when I discovered that he's in ministry and was visiting in the area, my level of irritation elevated significantly. It's obvious to me the man has never absorbed the person of Jesus in his heart. He has yet to shed his culturally formed attitude – a problem that is rampant within the Christian community. Encountering a person that identifies themselves as an apprentice of Jesus with such an air of arrogance and judgmentalism is no longer a surprise. But when one who has the role of representing the person of Jesus to the world acts in such a way – well, it's inexcusable.

And then the incident with the so-called 'christian' militia broke. Think of it, now. The term 'christian militia' is as reality-distorting as, say, New England grits – or chicken lips – or the People's Republic of China. It's such a misuse of Christ's name that I can't even bring myself to capitalize the word here.

Now, I'll be the first to point out the dangers of orthodoxy – a system of proper belief that accepts no critique. Many spirits as well as skulls have been crushed over the centuries by orthodox zealots. (Here I use small "o" orthodox to mean any group with an unbending rigidity which claims to have a lock on the only acceptable things one must believe.) But there should be some means of educating or coercing the news media to be a bit more judicious in their reporting. I mean, just because a group uses the word 'christian' doesn't mean the press needs to identify them as 'Christian'.

About the same time, there was a gathering of people in Washington, DC who thought it was OK to use racial slurs, sexual intimidation, spitting, and even threats of violence because they didn't get their own way.

The aggressive, combative, hateful attitudes on display here are popping up all over. Glenn Beck of Fox News launched a crusade to "expose" Jim Wallis, the evangelical head of Sojourners, which is a Christian organization that promotes issues of social justice. Beck openly encouraged all his listeners to run from their church if their pastor ever uses the term "social justice." (By the way, I e-mailed Mr. Beck and suggested that he go to a book store, buy a Bible, and read any of the four Gospels to discover who the person of Jesus is.)

Then, a potential Presidential candidate displayed a map at a political rally with bull's eyes overlaying several key congressional districts in the upcoming election, urging the crowd to not retreat, but to reload. She can choose whatever political ideology that floats her boat, just like anyone else. But when a person makes a public issue of being a Christian, and then uses words and imagery suggestive of using deadly violence, something is seriously wrong. There's even a church in Kentucky whose pastor advertised a Sunday where all persons openly carrying a gun would be welcome.

So, what is my point? All this is coming from a nation where over 70% *claim* to be Christian. To me, this means either we have a very intimidating and violent non-Christian minority, or we have at least some Christians that revel in insulting the person of Jesus. I'm brought to wondering out loud, "What nation am I living in? What century is this? Where is the response from the Christian community?"

Maybe the sociologists are correct. This is a nation that has a love affair with violence. Entertainment isn't successful without violence. Athletic events at all levels have become more violent, and that violence is being continued off the courts and fields of play. Fights erupt in the halls of legislatures and in the halls of our schools.

Yet during the Advent season, we sing songs honoring the Prince of Peace.

It may be a bit early to think about Christmas, but it is not too early to work against the violence that takes place all around us. It's never the wrong time to advance the work of Jesus. When you hear people using violent imagery in their speech, there's nothing wrong with saying, "You lost me on that one. Jesus has convinced me that violence has no place in my life." When you hear someone saying they hate someone, there's nothing wrong with saying, "Hey, that's pretty strong language, isn't it? Jesus has convinced me that love is a better way."

Will your doing this make a difference? I don't know. But I do know that doing nothing won't. And if you don't say something to counter latent violence, who will?

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud