

Heralding Christian Faith in our Interfaith World

Reflections on 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Worldwide Communion Sunday, October 3, 2010

Trinity United Ottawa

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*“Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord...
I am not ashamed for I know the one in whom I have put my trust.”*

The truth is, that certainly among my generation and younger, many today **do** feel embarrassed to publicly herald our Christianity. Our faith feels squeezed between the distortions of fundamentalism and the reaction of the new atheism. I heard many stories from faithful friends here this week about their awkward social moments when they reveal they are church-goers. When you mention church to a colleague or friend, do you ever experience that pause, as the wheels of their mind turn while they reassess - negatively - who you must be, if you're a Christian?

Many Moslems and Jews and people of other religions, experience the same judgement. Here is one admirable response. A one minute testimonial to religion in action. It's from a U-tube site called 'Tole-rants.'

Never since Roman persecution in the times of that Epistle, has it been more difficult to be a herald of Christianity. Yet never has there been a time when it was more important to the world, for us to live true to our Christian faith, as followers of Jesus' way. Never was it more important for us to practise the faith that is particular to our culture - not to lose it! Lived Christianity is **our** inherited cultural way to enlightenment, to the personal transformation that enables us to take part in the Spirit work of saving the world.

Our *lived* Christian faith **is** a good treasure that we must guard in this generation, for the good of generations to come. The prayer-filled practises of Christianity that we - hopefully - saw lived out by our mothers and grandmothers like Timothy did, can discipline us to be part of an active, open communion, promoting peace and

compassion in the world. According to Jesus' example. Lived Christian love is a vital component of human commitment to global hope - alongside all the components offered by other religions, when each is practised from their common core - compassion - love in action.

But never has it been more important that we be Christians who are true to our penultimate tradition: the life modelled by Jesus of Nazareth. He practised his Jewish religion in daily prayerful relationship with the Holy, modelling for the ages how to be awake to God's presence in all people and all Creation. Religion, for Jesus was about living compassionately in God's Kingdom, a communion without boundaries. He was re-forming his religion in his time, as we are in ours, to be a Spirit community living for compassion. A religious community where belonging did not imply a defensive wall of exclusive power and superiority, but instead invited everyone across all differences, to converse at an open table. A table where all religions met as equal children of God, to learn about how to love each other.

Today, on Worldwide Communion Sunday, I cannot celebrate an exclusive, worldwide Christian club that other religions should yearn to join. I do feel deeply called to herald a lived Christianity that proudly puts our trust in Jesus. That brings our leader as a living Christ presence, to the table of global community-building. I am anxious to hear **his** conversation with all the other religions that celebrate compassion and practise their love of justice. Together the world's religions can Spirit-storm the how-to's of hope for our world. What would that conversation sound like? I suspect there would not be any bickering about religious doctrines or rules about who deserves to share the daily bread.

The 19th century Hindu teacher Sri Ramakrishna told how he had followed the paths to enlightenment described in all the major religions. He learned that although different traditions used various routes of practice, they all met in the same experience - joyful union with the divine. He wrote: "God has made religions to suit different aspirants, times and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths." Ramakrishna taught - as Jesus showed - that the worship most pleasing to the Divine

is our service to others.

The Zohar, the Jewish mystical book says that “When humanity is at one, God is One.” Today, in these urgent times, our world needs every genuinely lived and practised religion. We need all religions, at their best, dedicating lives to Holy unity and peace. This shared religious vision can orchestrate divided countries and confused peoples to walk together and save the world.

Toward that end, Gandhi advised that “A friendly study of all the scriptures is the sacred duty of every individual.” On this Worldwide Communion Sunday, let us commit to knowing other religions and working with all religious who aspire to peace. Let us not draw **any** defensive boundaries around our Communion Table. Because Jesus didn’t. Let us instead be proud, unashamed Christians, communing as equals with all the other heralds of God’s love who live their religious hope for unity in our multi-faith world. There lies peace, Jesus’ promise and the shared hope of the world.

Let’s sing a hymn to help set that intention in our bodies and minds.
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