
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

August 10, 2014

Uneasy Worship

"I know your works. Look! I have set in front of you an open door that no one can shut. You have so little power, and yet you have kept My Word and haven't denied My Name."

Revelation 3:8 (Common English Bible)

Increasingly today, people go to church when their lives are uneasy and other resources for restoring calm and order have been exhausted. What they seek from church is a healing balm; they look to be soothed with inspirational music and drugged with holy words that promise security. This romanticized notion of church must be confronted with the facts. Church was never intended to be a stable, smug and conventional purveyor of religious sedatives. The prophet Amos corrects this polished impression of God's gathered people, "Doom to those resting comfortably in Zion! (Amos 6:1a)

If the church is called to be uneasy, the Presbyterian Church (USA) is doing something right. There is a deep divide in the present leadership of the church over the Palestinian and Israeli conflict and the question of divesture from companies that are abetting Israeli violation of Palestinians' human rights. The recent Authoritative Interpretation concerning marriage is viewed as not only an act of dishonesty but as unfaithful to the Church's own polity while others celebrate the correction of injustice toward persons marginalized by the church. Absent is the stability and assurance many seek within the walls of our sanctuaries.

The author of Revelation is well acquainted with uneasy worship. Church as an amiable and undisturbed place of comfort is unknown to John. Present is a deep and pervasive uneasiness. It is in the midst of this angst that God speaks a word to John, "Look! I have set in front of you an open door that no one can shut." God's people must now decide. They can withdraw from the present discomfort of the church and seek some physical or mental drug to relieve the distress or accept the challenge to new life and hope; to walk through the open door at the invitation of our Lord.

Acceptance of the Lord's invitation must begin with a new commitment to spiritual formation. If our shared worship and ministry is to be a springboard for a revival of faith and a renewal of the church, we must place our parched lips once more to the springs of spiritual power that flows from a growing relationship with Jesus. It will be the renewal of what the church only occasionally now calls "piety" that will give rise to a new dynamic for engagement in the secular world. The future of the church depends upon the renewal of faith in the living and active Christ and an uneasy worship that recognizes that the kingdoms of this world are in conflict with the Kingdom of our Lord. God sets before the church an open door that welcomes us to a deeper understanding of God's will and a greater reception of God's grace. Moving through that door will demand honestly facing the present uneasiness of the church and the trust that God's Word is true; that what God opens before us can never be shut.

Gracious God, help us to honestly face the uneasiness of the church; to recognize the conflict between our earthly world and Your heavenly Kingdom, and to choose to walk in the undeniable truth of Your Word.

Doug Hood

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