

## ***CRIBBS NOTES-May 20, 2007***

All around us people are suffering. There are those who know the pain of loneliness and abandonment. They suffer. Some live with alcoholics who are abusive and disrespectful of themselves and others when they are drunk. They suffer. Children have little control over circumstances that dictate where and how they spend their time. They suffer. At a distance, there are reports about bombs exploding in marketplaces killing scores of innocent people. They leave loved ones and friends who suffer. Nearly 40-thousand children died from malnutrition and starvation in the past 24 hours. They and others suffer. Suffering is no stranger throughout the world and across generations.

What is most remarkable is the extent to which many of us go to avoid or deny the reality of suffering. We bathe ourselves in the pool of illusion in a vain attempt to pretend we are unaffected by suffering. Consider the policy of the current administration to remove and eliminate all photographs and imagery of dead soldiers and coffins from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Think about how we receive sanitized, official stories regarding the destruction caused by those wars. Names are not given, injuries are not described, and deaths are not recorded or counted among the civilians and militant resisters within those countries.

One might think if we don't know what is going on and don't have the details about the resulting tragedies, then we are not responsible. We are removed from having to care and feel about the consequences. The same is nearly true about disasters that leave cities devastated and human beings forever scarred. Etched deeply within their souls is a profound sense of life that doesn't matter beyond them. Where is God? Does anybody know their condition? Who will rescue them?

When the unnamed girl with the power of divination followed Paul and Silas around town day after day announcing to the crowds, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation," Paul suffered. She annoyed him to the point of vexation. He called out the spirit that possessed her and left her powerless. Paul sought to relieve the agony he suffered each time he heard her voice. Unfortunately, it was not her condition of involuntary servitude or slavery that caused him pain. It was her constant cry and proclamation that tormented him. (Acts 16:16-35)

What will it take for us to act against the powers of oppression? When will we have had enough and are forced to do something? Too often, it is not until we are directly affected by events do we get involved.

We are reminded of that familiar quotation by the Reverend Martin Neimoller about waiting and tolerating evil, "First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me."

Pastor Neimoller spent eight years in Nazi prisons because he spoke out. His life was forever changed, including his previous anti-Semitic position and pronouncements before his imprisonment. Like Paul, he had a conversion experience that defined his relationship with God and humanity. He suffered.

Today, more is required of us in the face of a suffering world. To follow Jesus means we must "take up our cross." We, too, must suffer. We are called to speak up for those whose voices are silenced and realities are shaded from sight.

People in our homes, communities, across the nation and around the world are praying, yea, they are screaming, hoping we will know them and do something to make a positive difference. What will you do? What will it take? Perhaps you have been called to an unexpected ministry.