



CRIBBS NOTES

We welcome the Reverend Dr. Jake Pomeroy to the pulpit

today. Jake and his wife, Marlene, are co-pastors of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Pasadena. Jake serves the wider United Church of Christ in several capacities, including as staff of the Cornerstone Foundation, an agency that assists local churches with capital campaigns. Also, he teaches as adjunct faculty at the Claremont School of Theology. He has a passion for justice and a commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ. We are pleased he is joining us to bring God's Word to God's people. Jake and Marlene have two teenaged children.

This is an incredibly amazing moment in history. We are facing some of the most heart-wrenching events humankind has ever had to deal with. The global economic meltdown; BP oil crisis in the Gulf of Mexico; wars in Iraq; Afghanistan; Sudan and Somalia; high unemployment; soaring tuition for public higher education; home foreclosures; sky-rocketing gasoline prices; increased medical care costs; and the polarized political spectrum are only a few of the mega-activities that drain our personal, communal, and national resources. We are in a mess without a map to recover anytime soon.

In Cuba, this may be described as a "Special Period." Our neighbors on that Caribbean island know too well the challenges, hardships, and suffering associated with economic uncertainties and downturns. They know what it means to struggle, sacrifice, and try to save in the midst of financial disaster. Their lessons are available to help us get through this time.

For all the misinformation, lies, and distorted perspectives about Cuba so broadly disseminated across the United States, it is nearly impossible to dismiss, ignore, or contradict the survival skills readily evident in nearly every sector of that society. The people of Cuba have lived with economic boycotts and sanctions for nearly five decades. They experienced the loss of viable, international partners with the fall of the former Soviet Union. Yet, they persevered and provided medical and educational services and opportunities to other countries that have far less than they. There are lessons for us from Cuba, if we are willing to learn.

Our special period provides opportunities for us to re-think what is taking place around us and in our name. Instead of attacking President Barack Obama's every effort to correct the course we have been on for the past 30 years that has brought us to the brink of despair, we need to muster support to unify our nation and establish a new set of priorities that put people first.

In order to begin an effective turnaround across America, God must become central in our lives. Realizing we are a pluralistic country with many faith traditions, it is important to honor, respect, and allow all religious practices that affirm the dignity, quality, and value of nature and human life. The answer to our problems is found within the tenets and sacred texts of our faiths. That is one of the essential reasons the people of Cuba have endured despite unrelenting assaults.

At the very core of their efforts to address major challenges is a commitment to compassion and understanding of the human condition. That is sorely lacking in much of what we are witnessing in the United States.

Profits and power overshadow our view of placing priority on people. In the language of faith, we suffer from idolatry that leads to isolation and alienation. We become fearful and suspicious rather than faithful and hospitable. Greed and selfishness demand our full attention and misguide our steps to recovery.

Critics may say Cuba is a poor example to demonstrate faith-driven strategies to alleviate societal disorder. However, the social experiments in that country are derived from a fundamental value placed on the welfare of children, elders, and the most vulnerable. The influence of religion has resulted in a deep desire to assure housing, health, education, and food are available to every person. How does that compare to our priorities? What measures are we taking to meet the needs of all people who have lost their jobs, homes, and hope?

This amazing moment is our opportunity to change and create new ways to address the problems in front of us. We cannot succeed by supplying services to some and leaving others to fend for themselves.

“A nation divided cannot stand.” Failure to re-order our values and apply the principles of our faiths to deal with the myriad social challenges can only result in a deterioration of the quality of life in America. We can do better. If we don’t know where to start, it may be worth looking to our neighbors to see what they have done. We may be surprised by what we discover.

-Pastor Art Cribbs