

CRIBB<S>NOTE - August 23, 2009

Every Sunday we come to church to worship God. We sing hymns, offer prayers, read Scripture, and listen to sermons. It is a special time when we set aside everything else in our lives to concentrate on the Creator. This is an act of faith. In accordance with our covenant with God, we “remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” But is that enough?

In the short letter written by Jesus’ brother James to the twelve tribes of Israel that were scattered throughout the world, we are instructed to make our faith known by our deeds. Much more is required of us than merely assembling in the sanctuary every week and ‘having church’. James teaches us to make our faith meaningful by transforming our minds and changing our priorities. He wrote, “Faith without works is also dead” (James 2:26b).

For centuries, the Book of James survived as literature within the early Christian communities. His commitment to humility and submission before God was well within the ancient tradition of the prophets. Yet, he brought a more contemporary understanding of what it meant to be faithful. The influence of Jesus is clearly articulated within James’ writing as he pushed his readers to act on behalf of the ‘orphans and widows’.

His letter still has relevance. In fact, the dawn of the 21st Century offers an era of urgent need to embrace the precise, clear, call to adopt a way of life that conforms to God’s intention for people to care for one another with radical love. The very issues that existed in the First Century continue to disrupt tranquility today.

This week we lost one of the great voices for human compassion. The death of Senator Ted Kennedy again puts the spotlight on efforts to make universal healthcare available and accessible in the United States. I am reminded of the second time I met Senator Kennedy.

He came to Seattle, Washington, in 1974 to visit the public health hospital and advocate for universal healthcare. It was his passion and the one issue he had hoped to resolve within in his political career. He argued and prodded to have the United States Congress move less deliberately to insure every person would have health insurance and sufficient medical facilities established to meet the needs of people across the country. The public health hospital in Seattle was slated to be closed when Senator Kennedy traveled there to inspect it.

Last week I was cleaning out my garage when I came across an old newspaper from 1994. A lengthy article was written about then First Lady Hillary Clinton’s efforts to bring about healthcare reform. Reading that article 15 years later was exactly like listening to the same voices of opposition today. We have not come very far. In fact, we have slipped woefully backward.

James’ letter to the people living far from home all those many years ago, reminds us of what we must do now in our time to correct the stubborn mistakes that continue to plague our society.

It is the same way today as it was when the prophet Ezekiel wrote about Sodom, the city destroyed by God raining sulfur. “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” (Ezekiel 16:49)

If our faith is to have any value today, it is necessary for us to think and act differently than how most things are measured by popular culture and politically expedient public servants. As people of faith, we must be an alternative presence in a nation that neglects the poor and needy, and fails to properly provide for those who struggle and suffer. I urge you to read James’ letter again and determine how we together can go forward and become a real community of faithful people worshipping God.