

*CRIBB<S>NOTE – September 13, 2009*

Jesus doesn't have time for 'jiving' around. There are serious issues that have put people and families in crisis. Now is not the time to play with people's lives or their souls. We don't have to look very far to see the devastation that sweeps over our neighborhoods. Even in the apparent enclave of suburbia, life is turned upside down by events that capture our attention and resources. In fact, across the vast landscape of Los Angeles County and Southern California a torrent of critical concerns flood the lives of people who are under water financially, mentally, and health wise. These are times that require our utmost response.

Jesus understood the stresses caused by uncertainty and calamities beyond our control. He empathized with people who suffered unjust consequences for things not of their making. Jesus did not toy with people's pain and disappointment. He engaged folk right where they were and encouraged them to turn toward God and go deeper within themselves. He took their situations seriously and personally.

Today, people are searching for understanding and compassion. They need someone to empathize with them. Most people do not seek pity. They desire a listening ear and corrective actions. They want to be encouraged. They want help.

Sometimes it is hard to ask for what we need. It is hard to face the mirror and see clearly what is happening to us. Yet, in these days we are surrounded by unavoidable challenges. It may feel as if nobody knows our sorrow, hurt, and confusion. Bad news is delivered through our mailbox with a first-class stamp. The saturation of terrible and tragic occurrences fill-up our television and computer screens. There is no escape. There is no relief. Even when we turn them off, we hear bad news in conversations.

Jesus doesn't shut us out. Instead, we are welcomed in and invited to bring our burdens and place them at the altar. Jesus calls us into the sanctuary where life is embraced and hope is offered. People of faith are not separated from the harsh realities of daily living. We do not have ready answers to the myriad of questions racing through the hearts and minds of seekers. People of faith are open to questions and are willing to journey on the long quest for resolve and comfort.

There are no guarantees the answers will come. There are no guarantees life will get better soon. But that is not the point. We can agree to walk together and assist each other through these times.

In the words of my late pastor the Rev. Dr. Cleo Malone, "We can put neighbor back into neighborhood." We can stand together in solidarity with people who struggle and suffer. We realize no one needs to feel left alone. There is community where everyone is accepted and nobody is rejected.

Almost every significant issue people are facing today can be adequately addressed by our community. The Native American spiritualist Harold Belmont puts it simply, "If there is a problem in the community, the solution to that problem is in the community."

Jesus taught his followers to form community. Community is comprised of persons who are familiar and strangers. Community is not a closed club or exclusive environment. Rather, community is a sacred space where hospitality is extended and love abounds. Community is where people inquire about the health and well being of others. It is propelled by unselfish service and a commitment to protect and preserve the

integrity of every person. Jesus expressed a radical clarification of what it takes to be in community. It places God above all else and puts others ahead of self.

If we were to practice our faith, ideals, and platitudes, most of the problems we face could be solved. That is why Jesus did not 'jive' with people's lives. He took each one seriously and attended to the specific need that was in front of him. He realized the importance of caring for people who were hungry, hurt, houseless, and alone. Jesus expects all of us to do the same for our sisters and brothers today. When we act with loving mercy and kindness, the circumstances may not change but our attitude and ability to cope will be substantially improved.