

"Hope in Action: Putting People First"

Isaiah 42:1-9

Matthew 20:20-28

What a privilege that we can join together on All Saints Day honoring the work of the ACT Alliance Assembly "Hope in Action: Putting People First" and beginning the work of the WCC Executive Committee as we continue to walk together on our pilgrimage of justice and peace.

I want to begin with a personal story. Some 20 years ago in 1998 I took my first renewal leave as a bishop. My husband and I got on our tandem bicycle in early July and rode from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, across the United States in 2 months, from Astoria, Oregon, to York, Virginia, 4059 miles in 58 days. It was exhilarating and renewing. We didn't want to stop. We loved the fresh air and seeing the world from a bicycle seat, complete with amber waves of grain and purple mountain majesty and corn fields and coal trucks and blue skies and one or two rainy rides. (You will have to talk with me later to learn more)

When I returned to work it could no longer be business as usual. So I did something crazy. I told the people of my conferences that during the next year I would spend 1000 hours in hands on work with the poor and those in need. A 1000 hours is a lot, roughly 20 hours a week, in addition to my normal work schedule, which was very heavy. I started by telling the churches I didn't want to just come and preach for an anniversary or celebration, but that I wanted to come and spend time at the churches differently. I wanted to join them in their service ministries in their community. So I started with one that fed the homeless once a week. I joined the pastor in preparing the meal and feeding the people. It took about 6 hours. But the pastor

said that since he had worked alongside me he would donate his hours...so that made 12. I had begun! I went to a church that provided overnight housing for homeless families. IN the evening I helped parents prepare lunches for their children for the next day. Both parents were working but there was not enough money for a place to live. Of course staying overnight with them gave me another 8 hours.

During the year I visited prisons and county jails and halfway houses and prison release programs and after school programs for children. I served countless meals to the hungry. I met children who had been through more tragedy than I could imagine. I saw churches conducting Bible studies in jails and accompanying the prisoners to court in order to support them. I listened to the stories of people eating at the soup kitchens. I worked on Habitat houses and visited disaster response centers.

By the times the year was over and others had donated their time to me, I hadn't served just 1000 hours....no, we had served together well over 4000 hours. And that's just the ones we officially counted.

So of course the next year, and in the years since, I have had to remember we walk on 2 feet---compassion and justice. Yes, we serve those in need, but we also need to change the systems and policies that keep them oppressed. We have to walk on both feet....Justice, mercy, justice, mercy...keep on walking.

What I learned in all of this is what our ministry is about in ACT Alliance and the World Council of Churches. It is to follow, as the Isaiah passage states,

"the servant, the chosen, who will bring forth justice to the nations - who will not cry or lift up voice

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*or break a bruised reed - a compassionate leader
establishing justice in the earth;;;
bringing prisoners from the dungeon, from
the prison those who sit in darkness."*

*Whoever Isaiah intended, Jesus certainly fulfilled this prophecy...
and then reminded his followers...*

"are you able to drink the cup I am about to drink?"

*"Whoever wishes to be great among you must be
your servant"*

"the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve."

*Or, as my friend who preached on this passage in church last
Sunday said, "we find our Life in Self Giving Love."*

*We are called to serve, all of us...not out of some title...but with
the identity and self awareness that we are children of God.*

*We know who we are and we recognize our brothers and
sisters as they are, and we meet them where they are, and offer
to help meet their needs.*

*With our executive committee in Jordan last year, I was most
moved by our visit to the refugee camp.....When we have shared
identity with those seeking home we can offer ourselves in
service.*

*When Jesus sends the seventy out into towns and places,
he does not send them as Lutheran, Presbyterian, Orthodox, or
Methodist. He doesn't send them as priest, deacon,
metropolitan, bishop, or laity. He does not say "you bishops attend
to these matters and you diaconals to these."*

In the beginning we are sent simply as children of God...nothing more, nothing less. And it is only when we are in right relationship with one another, and with those we serve, that we are in right relationship with God.

Is not this Jesus' constant message, to see one another as God's own, instead of as Samaritan, or prostitute, or tax collector. To see one another standing on the same ground, the valley lifted up and the mountain brought low, all standing together, coming as the children of God that Jesus invites us to be so that we might see the Kingdom in one another, in our midst.?

Could this be why he says "see if you have eyes with which to see"....See that the harvest is plentiful, everywhere, all around us, all the time.

If God's abundance and family are all around us, all the time, then the question of where to go becomes simple, just go!! As we step out, we will step into ministry.

Too often we think of it too geographically. We "go into all the world" and imagine that is our neighborhood, our district, a rural place or an urban place. And yet as Jesus sends the seventy he sends them with nothing "carry no purse, no bag, no sandals." The emphasis is not on a place but rather a way of seeing one another.

It is about having an attitude of compassion for one another. "Whatever house you enter, first say' peace to this house." We are sent into the world seeing the world in a different way.

To see it as God sees-it --a harvest filled with the family of God. We go into the world knowing that mercy and justice to together. One cannot happen without the other. We go into the world as

"Hope in Action: Putting People First." We go into the world in the same way as Christ comes into the world -- full of hope, of divine power, of healing, of compassion, of passion for justice, of love.

Our way as Christians is the way of love. We are to practice the Way of Love.....Speak Love -- Sing Love -- Pray Love -- Dance Love -- Walk Love -- Cook Love -- Pick up a straw with Love -- Whisper Love -- Weave Love -- Run Love -- Ride Love -- Shout Love -- tickle love -- cry love -- breathe love -- grow love -- paint love -- tune love -- feed love...

*Learn to Love Love -- more than anything
more than any place
more than any name*

God, on Your Way - the Way of Christ - for the harvest of Love is plentiful.