

Sunday, October 18, 2015
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon: "One Love"

I have just returned from the Parliament of World Religions.

When I first read the scripture for today I wondered how I would tie it in to the events at the Parliament.

The Parliament, which has been meeting since the late 1800's was created "to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world."

The vision is that fear and hatred will be replaced with understanding and respect and that all the world will learn to care for and about their neighbors.

The theme of the conference was 'restoring the heart of humanity.'

As I listened to the speakers, representing all different religions from every corner of the world I realized that Mark's gospel is simply a small, local story about a universal problem.

How much of our religious animosity toward others is based on the desire to be the most important?

How often do we harbor thoughts of greatness when we ought to be thinking of ways to serve?

The first day of the conference was the inaugural Women's Assembly bringing together thousands of women from all over the world...a gathering that made religious history.

There was much discussion about the role that religion can play in empowering women and the importance of women understanding the various scriptures that have governed their lives for centuries.

It was incredibly powerful.

The stage that first morning was populated with over a dozen women in a range of colorful indigenous dress.

Most were accomplished scholars and academics, but many were activists ranging from Native American healers to African and Asian women voicing hope and optimism for their cultures.

The overarching theme was 'One Love.'

The prevailing sentiment was that we are all created by God, gifted with this amazing planet Earth, and called to live together – to support and sustain one another answering our highest calling.

The opening ceremony that evening was a group of drummers and a procession of Ute tribe representatives-the indigenous people of Utah, followed by a host of local politicians.

I was initially uncomfortable with the Native American celebration, feeling that we were exploiting a people whom we (white, religious Americans) had evicted from their land.

I later learned that having the tribe present was reparation for having excluded both Native Americans and Mormons from the first Parliament in 1893.

The second day I sat in on a presentation by Native American Women, some from the Lakota tribe that we work with in South Dakota.

These women were calling for an international day of healing and reconciliation on December 29.

They talked about the importance of forgiveness and restoration of relationships between peoples in order to move forward to build a just, sustainable world.

I was particularly moved by one woman's advocacy for shared rituals.

She said that unless we opened our hearts to one another, accepting our differences and sharing our cultures, we could not make progress.

Later in the week I would share a Shabbat service with the Jewish community, participating in their ritual of singing psalms as a way of welcoming the Sabbath.

Friday morning's plenary session was electrifying.

Fourteen different speakers shared their vision of a world where peace prevailed.

As one speaker observed, "In this hall every religion is represented, 80 countries are represented, we are a microcosm of the world...and we are here in peace; we are here in love; we are here in understanding. We are here to show the world that this can be done."

Speaker after speaker tapped into the rich ancestry of those who came before us and spoke in hopeful tones of what could be.

The theme throughout the week was one of promise – a deeply held belief that if we could honor one another, we could mend the world.

Friday night the spotlight was on emerging leaders.

One particularly compelling speaker was a fourteen year old girl, a young activist who spoke of hope for the future and the importance of actively engaging in the work of community building.

Saturday morning, Karen Armstrong, author of the Charter for Compassion, was one of several panelists addressing 'texts of terror' from the Abrahamic traditions. She was joined by an Islamic scholar from Georgetown University and one of the first woman rabbis in America.

Each one spoke of the importance of reading our sacred texts as inspired by God, and interpreted for our lives today.

It was clear, throughout the conference, that we must always examine deeply our own religious beliefs as well as those of others.

As I reflected on my experiences at the Parliament and how it felt to be among almost 10,000 people seeking peace, I recognized that many of our problems in the world stem from the type of behavior exhibited by James and John in this morning's gospel.

Too often we believe that we have to assert ourselves into a favored position to have worth.

Too often, we belittle someone who thinks, acts or lives differently than we do.

Too often, we hoard our own resources – more than we need – rather than sharing with our brothers and sisters whose lives may not have been as privileged as ours.

We are in the midst of budget deliberations in this church.

It is the time of year when our thoughts turn to money.

We attempt to project what our income and expenses will be for the year ahead and we propose a budget.

At the same time we appeal to you to pledge your support for the church.

I finished reading *The Soul of Money* on the plane to Utah.

I ask each of you to read this book.

Lynn Twist's closing paragraph stayed with me throughout the week:

In this world of turmoil and conflict, violence and retribution, I believe there are millions of people taking responsibility not just for change, but also for transformation, for creating miracles.

I challenge you to use your money, every dollar, every penny, every purchase, every stock and every bond, to voice this transformation;

I challenge you to use the money that flows through your life to express the truth and context of sufficiency rather than scarcity;

I challenge you to move the resources that flow through your life toward your highest commitments and ideals, those things you stand for;

I challenge you to hold money as a common trust that we're all responsible for using in ways that nurture and empower us, and all life, our planet, and all future generations.

I challenge you to imbue your money with soul—your soul—and let it stand for who you are, your love, your heart, your word, and your humanity.

My friends, we are people of hope; people of promise.

We must dream of a future where our world is at peace and where every single created being is cared for, nurtured, sustained, honored and loved.

We must use our resources to make that dream come true.

We were created as one love – we must live that way.

We can do no less.