

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Fifth Sunday of Easter – April 24, 2016
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Acts 11:1-18

For Reflection

“Isn't it amazing that we are all made in God's image, and yet there is so much diversity among his *[sic]* people?”

— Desmond Tutu (b.1931) South African social rights activist, retired Anglican bishop

“Ultimately, America's answer to the intolerant man *[sic]* is diversity.”

— Robert Kennedy (1925–1968) American politician from Massachusetts

Radical Inclusion

According to Jewish law:

Animals with cloven hooves that chew their cud are kosher, including cattle, sheep, goats, and deer. Other, mammals, like pigs, camels, and hares aren't kosher... Not only are they not to be eaten by Jews, but no products which derive from them are kosher.

<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/how-to-follow-jewish-dietary-laws.html>

Peter's vision basically took down this law. But it was more than just allowing Jews to eat non-kosher meat. It was pointing out that Jews were not the only ones that G-d was interested in. Gentiles – non-Jews – were people too – and capable of hearing the message that Jesus came to live and give.

At the time, this was a message of radical inclusion: Non-Jews could also be G-d's chosen to follow in the footsteps of Messiah. A revolutionary idea.

Can you imagine some Christians today hearing the message that Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Wiccans, Hindus – are also G-d's beloved and are welcome into the Church as full participating members of the Beloved Community? WE may be able to imagine it because of our stance as Progressive Christians – which might better be referred to as Regressive – as it goes back to this story of radical inclusion and Peter's vision. But I assure you – this is a conversation killer in many conservative/fundamentalist churches.

Last year most of you are aware that you sent David Weinreb and me on a mission to Burning Man – the 10-day art festival in northern Nevada. We were to represent Mt. Hollywood UCC there – and bring back inspiration for our ministry here. I am still living the repercussions of that trip. As we shared, there are 10 Guiding Principles of Burning Man that have emerged over the years. And number one is RADICAL INCLUSION. Here's the text:

The 10 Principles of Burning Man

Burning Man co-founder Larry Harvey wrote the Ten Principles in 2004 as guidelines for the newly-formed Regional Network. *They were crafted not as a dictate of how people should be and act, but as a reflection of the community's ethos and culture as it had organically developed since the event's inception.*

Radical Inclusion

Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.

<http://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/10-principles/>

What is interesting to note is that – as with our 10 so-called commandments or suggestions – people wrestle with actually living out this principle. I had some trepidation about being a “Christian minister” on the Playa – because I was afraid of being perceived as a faith predator and avoided – or dismissed as irrelevant. The Temple on the Playa is specifically “spiritual” – not religious. I felt like the word “Christian” as a descriptor would be misinterpreted as “fundamentalist” – therefore exclusive – therefore in violation of the principle of Radical Inclusion.

How convoluted is that? And yet it comes straight out of our experience here in the Default World. How many of us admit we are Christian in public – fearing we'll be perceived and dismissed as “one of THOSE Christians?”

As things turned out, I was fully accepted by Que Viva Camp – some of whom are also church related – some through their work, others through family and/or faith. And as soon as I said, “You know, Jesus was a Burner...” I was in. I was referring to the way Jesus lived out the 10 principles – and how much he would have entered into and relished the Burning Man experience.

I googled the phrase “radical inclusion” and found the first page full of blogs about how this is experienced or challenged at Burning Man. There has been some soul searching about the acceptance of “rich people” and those who “commodify” or “sell” Burning Man to people who would rather watch than participate. One of the best

approaches was that rich people could be saved from their exclusive perspective through hospitality and story-telling – showing them a new way to be in the world.

It's easy to get angry. It's easy to be hurt and to recoil and to hurl insults. The more courageous choice, the more powerful choice, requires you speaking up in kind and patient ways. Be hospitable. Be generous. Be creative in your interactions. Isn't this why you love Burning Man?

<http://journal.burningman.org/2014/10/philosophical-center/tenprinciples/radical-self-reliance-and-rich-people-at-burning-man/>

Then this blog caught my eye:

Radical Inclusion: From Jesus to Jedi's to Juggalos

April 21, 2014 By John "Halcyon" Styn

Happy Easter, Spring, Lunar Eclipse, 4/20, Passover, whathaveyou

Writing on the Temple

"I don't care if you believe in me. I care if you act like me."

- Jesus C.

Easter time makes me think of Burning Man.

I was not always accepting of Christianity. In fact, I had a bitter life chapter where I woke up to the Lies of Institutional Religion (TM) with deep anger and judgment towards Christians and Christianity.

Then two things happened:

- 1) I went to Burning Man and learned how Radical Inclusion gives a framework to support others, even as you disagree with them.
- 2) I started co-hosting a podcast with my Grandfather, Rev. Caleb Shikles. And He showed me that Burning Man was my church.

... The beautiful thing about a religion or tribe is that it gives us a congregation. It gives us a non-biological family to reflect and affirm us. When we are "Welcomed Home" we come to understand that "who we really are" is okay. Not just okay, but amazing. This community acceptance allows us to recognize and cultivate our true selves. –

It was Burning Man that showed me the power of this type of community – and the powerful impact on personal growth.

<http://journal.burningman.org/2014/04/philosophical-center/tenprinciples/jesus-jedis-juggalos/>

Further down the search page was this story from Christianity Today – “a globally minded evangelical magazine that provides thoughtful, biblical perspectives on the news and ideas of our day.” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/help/about-us/what-is-christianity-today.html>

Finding Jesus at Burning Man

How God used us at one of America's most hedonistic gatherings

Phil Wyman/ AUGUST 8, 2012

Jesus was walking across the barren landscape, carrying a cross. I shouted to my friends, "Look, it's Jesus! Let's get a picture of him."

The three of us started walking across the desert toward Jesus, but he turned away, walking further into the nothingness. I hastened my pace and left my friends behind.

When I finally caught up to him, I said, "Hi, my name is Simon, and the Romans sent me to carry your cross." I hoped he'd get the reference. He did. Relieved, he handed me his cross, saying, "Oh, thank you. It's not too heavy, is it?"

I walked and talked with Jesus, and I told him my real name. "My friends and I created an art installation in honor of one of your saints, Simeon Stylites. We'd love to show it to you."

Jesus stopped. He looked me in the eyes and said, "Are you Phil Wyman?"

"Um, yes."

Jesus teared up. He said, "I've been looking for you. I was lost and couldn't find you."

Okay, that's weird, I thought. Jesus was lost, and now he's found. How often does that happen?

But this was Burning Man. And anything can happen at Burning Man.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/july-august/finding-jesus-at-burning-man.html>

I was beginning to think the words "radical inclusion" were the exclusive domain of the Burn when I finally found a UCC reference from Yvette Flunder's Refuge Fellowship in No. CA:

Radical Inclusivity is the *intentional inclusion* of all persons; especially people who have traditionally lived at the margins of society, such as people suffering from substance abuse; people living with HIV/AIDS; same-gender loving people; the recently incarcerated; and sex industry workers.

At the core of The Fellowship's mission and vision is a mandate from God to proclaim a gospel that is radically inclusive of all persons... *Inclusivity challenges major fundamental, deep-seated Christian beliefs, doctrines and theologies of the center of society which characterize people on the edge as enemies of God and routinely mistreats, oppresses and excludes people from the community of faith*

and its institutions. It is our purpose and aim to provide a safe place of refuge for persons who have been wounded by oppressive theologies and to provide a place of nurturing and training for those who feel called to this shared ministry.

<http://radicallyinclusive.com/what-is-radical-inclusivity>

I'd like to say we share a similar mission – and I have to say the Fellowship is way ahead of us in terms of living this out. It is actually the founding pillar of their existence. And the word “*intentional*” is important.

Believe it or not, google brought up an article from Huffington Post from last May which had a secular/political context:

Bill Clinton Calls For ‘Radical Inclusion’ In A Multiethnic America

05/12/2015

NEW YORK — Former President Bill Clinton urged America this week to embrace its multiethnic and multicultural future.

“I think the only thing that makes sense is to have a policy of radical inclusion,” Clinton said. “If you look at the world today, every place people are practicing inclusive politics, inclusive governance for corporations, inclusive economics, good things are happening... This is not rocket science.”

“You may win a lot of elections with divisive politics, but you won’t make much progress,” Clinton added.

The U.S. Census Bureau has predicted that by 2043, no single ethnic group will make up a majority of the country’s population.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/12/bill-clinton-univision_n_7267524.html

If you compare this to the principle of “wall building” and exclusion – it is perfectly clear where we need to reshape and INTENTIONALLY live our lives as Americans, let alone Progressive Christian Americans.

I glanced down to the 10th google listing and was brought up short by the title:

Project Radical Inclusion
by Laura Diamond posted Oct 3, 2015

<http://projectradicalinclusion.com/category/project-radical-inclusion/>

The lead photo was one that I took of Laura and Tony one of the first evenings we were there. We lost her on the 7th – so she posted four days before her death. It was her report on the relatively small but real success of her attempts to address the exclusion of poor people – specifically poor artists – from the rather costly experience of the Burning Man Art Festival. As many Burners were being judgmental and griping about rich people invading the Playa, Laura was busy focusing on the organization's neglect and exclusion of poor people from the Playa. That and the fact she invited some weird Christian minister to camp with her tells you a lot about her character and her commitment to Radical Inclusion in a tangible, living way.

In our Congregational Conversation today perhaps we can keep the principle of Radical Inclusion as a context for our decision-making. We NEED people who are different from us in order to grow spiritually and intellectually. We need to learn how to discuss differences without being divisive, to heal and include rather than divide and exclude.

What do we need to DO to INTENTIONALLY include people currently excluded from this Beloved Community?

How can we “step-up” our efforts to tear-down rather than build more walls?
What would Laura do? What would Jesus do? For real?

Scripture Reading for Sunday April 24, 2016 – Easter 5 – Year C

Acts 11:1-18

1 Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, 3 saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" 4 Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. 6 As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7 I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9 But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' 10 This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.

11 At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. 12 The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13 He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; 14 he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?"

18 When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Radical Self-Reliance and Rich People at Burning Man

October 3, 2014 By Rosie Lila

Some folks on Facebook have shared their stories about unfriendly experiences with people who were apparently connected to "rich camps". I also have my own story from this year.

That new camp that I mentioned being produced by two people who had never been to Burning Man before — yes, I had an unexpected and unpleasant experience with someone from their camp. It was an interaction that left me feeling unwelcome and shocked. What I ended up doing then and there was talking with the woman who had been icy cold toward me. I said to her that I wanted to clear any weirdness between us. I asked her if this was her first time to Burning Man. It was. I then said to her, warmly and kindly, "This is a place where people are friendly and playful with each other. This is not a place where you need to protect yourself from me or from anyone else in this city. We're here together to have fun together. So, welcome. Welcome to Black Rock City. Welcome to Burning Man." Her attitude changed. That wasn't what she was expecting from me. She wasn't expecting hospitality.

...

I've been talking a lot lately about this idea of getting your hands dirty. Burning Man is a place to get your hands dirty — where you can learn new things, grow, and have fun while doing it.

The problem in Black Rock City is not "rich people". To think that way is to be prejudiced.

In my opinion, the problem is one of sharing the stories of what it means to be part of Black Rock City. As I see it, there are two issues to address:

There is an influx of people who have the means to outsource their entire creative process to a paid staff. The problem with outsourcing your creativity is that you miss the opportunity to get your hands dirty. And this is often one of the most rewarding parts of Burning Man. You miss the opportunity to learn new things, to grow, and to challenge and surprise yourself.

The other problem is that these same people are often accustomed to living exclusive "VIP" lifestyles. They are accustomed to living behind walls, away from interacting with the general public. What these people don't realize is that the greatest fun in Black Rock City is often had in chance encounters with random people — with the "general public" of Burning Man.

You can't blame them for not knowing any better. How can you expect a person to change and live differently if he or she has never been shown a better way?

I believe that with time, with hospitality, and with excellent storytelling we will see more camp organizers/producers/funders starting to ask the question, "How do I help my camp members get their hands dirty?"

The solution to this problem is around us educating each other.

...

It's easy to get angry. It's easy to be hurt and to recoil and to hurl insults. The more courageous choice, the more powerful choice, requires you speaking up in kind and patient ways. Be hospitable. Be generous. Be creative in your interactions. Isn't this why you love Burning Man?

<http://journal.burningman.org/2014/10/philosophical-center/tenprinciples/radical-self-reliance-and-rich-people-at-burning-man/>

THE TEN PRINCIPLES

Radical Inclusion: From Jesus to Jedi's to Juggalos.

April 21, 2014 By John "Halcyon" Styn

Happy Easter, Spring, Lunar Eclipse, 4/20, Passover, whathaveyou.

Writing on the Temple

"I don't care if you believe in me. I care if you act like me."

- Jesus C.

Easter time makes me think of Burning Man.

I was not always accepting of Christianity. In fact, I had a bitter life chapter where I woke up to the Lies of Institutional Religion(TM) with deep anger and judgment towards Christians and Christianity. Then two things happened:

1) I went to Burning Man and learned how Radical Inclusion gives a framework to support others, even as you disagree with them.

2) I started co-hosting a podcast with my Grandfather, Rev. Caleb Shikles. And He showed me that Burning Man was my church.

...

Don't get me wrong: I agree that countless atrocities have been done in the name of religion. And that blind acceptance of any teachings paves the way for horrible things.

But I would argue that the main difference between a student of the teachings of Jesus and a follower of the 10 Principles is the amount of dusty faux fur in their closet.

Grandpa on Halloween (NOTE: Near the end of his life, my grandpa actually called himself a "Jesus Man" or "Baptist Buddhist" because he felt that the word "Christian" had come to mean so many things in contrast with the teachings of Jesus.)

While I appreciate the teachings of Jesus, I am not a Christian, by any means. I don't mean to defend or promote Christianity – only to point out that Radical Inclusion gives us a model for loving our neighbors – be they Jiffy Lubers, Death Guilders, Pink Hearters, or Human Caracas Carwashers.

This applies to "neighbors" on the default world, as well.

The beautiful thing about a religion or tribe is that it gives us a congregation. It gives us a non-biological family to reflect and affirm us. When we are "Welcomed Home" we come to understand that "who we really are" is okay. Not just okay, but amazing. This community acceptance allows us to recognize and cultivate our true selves.

It was Burning Man that showed me the power of this type of community – and the powerful impact on personal growth. But as I grow in the world, I see people blossom in all types of loving congregations. I have seen magical communities grow around Comic-con, Knitting, flow arts, and even the Insane Clown Posse. Yes, god bless the Juggalos.

Grandpa at Temple

Putting up a Grandpa memorial at the temple

As we congratulate ourselves for casting off the chains of our socialization, it can be tempting to judge others who have attached themselves to belief systems or communities that differ from our own. But the whole point of Radical Inclusion means accepting those who have taken different paths and express themselves differently. We must remember that in today's world "being different" can mean clown face paint, but it can also mean being devoted to an ancient tradition or long dead prophet.

It is easy to throw out baby Jesus with the bongwater – but the path of Radical Inclusion means we need to practice accepting everyone.

<http://journal.burningman.org/2014/04/philosophical-center/tenprinciples/jesus-jedis-juggalos/>