

PASTOR'S PAGE – AUGUST 2005

It seems as if plastic wrist bands have veritably proliferated. I don't know when it started for sure. I remember the yellow ones that Lance Armstrong was pushing a few years ago (beat cancer), but since then it seems as if any organization or cause that is worth anything at all has a wrist band of one color or another.

The other day I was meeting with a lady in my office, and the three wrist bands that I own all happened to be in a pile on my desk. She took a look at the posters that adorn the doors (“Not In Our Name”, “No Gallo!”, “U.S. Out of Iraq”, “War is Not the Answer”, “All Religions Believe in Justice”) and at the three bracelets, and then she said: “You don't strike me as patriotic. Why the red, white and blue wrist bands?”

You can imagine how I salivated at the conversation that we were going to have! Never mind the reason why she stopped by the office. This called for immediate response.

We began with a discussion of the difference between patriotism (I love my country, but think that at times it does things that are wrong and I should critique it when such is necessary) and nationalism (I love my country and think that it can never do anything wrong and hence a critique is never in order). I pointed out to her that most people confuse the two and that, actually, we had a fervor of nationalism going on in our country (not patriotism) the likes of which had not been on display since Italy and Germany in the 1940's.

After that we talked about that bastion of patriotism: the American flag. I told her about the “patriot” that I saw painting an American flag on a bus bench not too long ago. I stopped to talk to him to find out what he thought he was doing. He thought that he was honoring his country by permanently flying a painted flag on that particular bench. Now the flag is there 24 hours a day. During the night it flies in the dark (which is against the law). It flies during rainy weather (and I guess that is good – it cleans off the bird droppings that frequently decorate it). And, whenever someone sits down to wait for a bus they park their patriotic butts right in the middle of the flag! That's not my kind of patriotism.

Then I explained to her the three wristbands on my desk:

- The red one is from the United Farm Workers and is a stands for the rights of workers,
- The white one is from Live 8 and is a cry for an end to poverty,
- The blue one was distributed by the Friends Committee and is a statement in favor of peace and asking for an end to war.

Taken together I think that they are a statement about patriotism, at least patriotism as I understand it. They stand for the things that I would like my country to stand for. These seem to be ideals and beliefs that our present leadership has never even heard of, as they lead our country in a different direction. Their direction doesn't seem to contain any care for others. It is a direction of world domination, of lining the pockets of cronies, and of the worst corruption and malevolence our system of government has ever known.

About then our time was up. My visitor needed to move on to another office – perhaps one where she could actually do what she had come to do. But, she didn't leave empty handed. She asked where she could get red, white and blue wrist bands – so I gave her mine and told her to explain patriotism to anyone who asked about them. I wonder how she did.

+ + +

Recommended Radio:

KQKE

960AM

Air America – Talk Radio from the Left

Recommended Movie/DVD Rental:

The Story of the Weeping Camel

Some fairy tales are true... some legends are real.

Effortlessly blending drama, nature documentary, and ethnographic film, THE STORY OF THE WEEPING CAMEL weaves a magical tale about a nomadic Mongolian family who reunite a rejected baby camel with its mother. When a mother camel refuses to sustain her child, the keepers of the camels often reunite them in a ritual with folk music and chanting, the results of which elicit deep emotion--even causing the mother camel to weep real tears. Exploring more than just traditional ritual, this film speaks to the very nature of love--the baby camel cannot survive without his mother, just as no animal or person can.

Directors Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni drew upon the documentary style of Robert Flaherty (NANOOK OF THE NORTH), who recreated events to comprehensively portray his subjects. The pair tirelessly filmed spontaneous events for much of the mother-baby story, but chose to recreate certain moments in the family's daily life. A particularly humorous and insightful example involves a young boy who clearly feels conflicted between his family life and his desire for a more Western life. The film creates a contrast between the two, showing the boy listening to traditional fables in his family's tent, but then dreaming about owning a television. This spare film provides a visually enchanting and unique learning experience.... it is a window into a different way of life and the universal terrain of the heart.

Recommended Book:

The Gospel According to Tolkien
Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth
by
Ralph C. Wood

In this accessible and engaging book, Ralph Wood shows us that J. R. R. Tolkien's masterpiece is a deeply Christian work because it does not blink back the horrors of our terrible times but confronts them with startling honesty. Readers keep turning to this work because here they are immersed in significance and meaning – perceiving the Hope that can be found amidst despair; the Charity that overcomes vengeance; and the Faith that springs from the strange power of weakness.

The Gospel According to Tolkien will be loved by both longtime Tolkien fans and those recently drawn to his books through the popular feature films.

Quote of the Month:

*"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it
And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it."*
Eleanor Roosevelt