

PASTOR'S PAGE – MARCH & APRIL 2007

Musings

I watched a woman walking her dog today – at least I think that is what was taking place. It was hard to tell for sure. I was sitting on the deck, reading. They were going along the path in the field behind where I was staying. As I watched the woman left the path and walked out into the field. She bent down and picked something up and then walked back to the path, where her dog was sitting and patiently waiting for her. Then she took the object and showed it to the dog, before straightening up and throwing it in the direction they were going. The dog watched the ball as it bounced on the path and then as it bounced off of the path into the field. The dog ran ahead of the lady and sat down, looking in the direction the ball had taken as it left the path. When the lady arrived, the dog didn't move. Then the woman left the path and walked out into the field – and the dance began all over again.

I watched for about twenty minutes. Some days interesting drama is hard to find! Once or twice the dog left the path, and returned with a stick that he laid at the feet of the woman. She looked at the stick and then threw the ball again. And, the game of “throw the ball and fetch it yourself” continued.

The woman never did seem to catch on. The dog was not interested in chasing a ball down a path and off into a field. Obviously, however, the dog thought that she was (and that he had trained her well at the task). Perhaps if just once she had bent down and taken the stick and thrown it she and the dog might have engaged in the game of fetch that she seemed so intent upon having. I don't know. She never did.

As they wandered out of sight on the other side of the field I began to appreciate the parable that had played out in front of me. The lady, the dog, the ball, the stick, the winding path and the field: life in a mini-drama. How intent are we on doing things only one way (with a ball rather than a stick)? How often is the alternative answer literally brought and laid at our feet? How often do we kick it out of the way, so that we can go back to the “solution” we have come up with, rather than seriously looking at the one that might work?

The dog knew the answer and was ignored; the woman thought she knew the answer and wouldn't listen or see. How often do we disregard the other who has the answer because we are set in our way, convinced of our own rightness, mired in the swamp of our own delirium?

Too often, I fear. I plan to work on that. I hope you will join me.

Meditation

[This year I am reading “*The Violence of Love*” as a meditation resource. These words of Archbishop Oscar Romero were compiled and translated by James R. Brockman, S.J.]

Three short years transformed Archbishop Oscar Romero from a conservative defender of the status quo

into one of the church's most outspoken voices on behalf of the oppressed. Though silenced by an assassin's bullet, his spirit – and the vital challenge of his life – lives on.

I offer his words to you for your meditation, as well.]

*Let us not measure the church by the number of its members
or by its material buildings.*

*The church has built many houses of worship,
many seminaries,
many buildings that have been taken from her.*

*They have been stolen
and turned into libraries
and barracks
and markets
and other things.*

That doesn't matter.

The material walls here will be left behind in history.

*What matters is you, the people,
your hearts.*

God's Grace giving you God's truth and life.

Don't measure yourselves by your numbers.

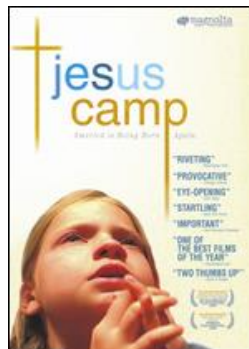
*Measure yourselves by the sincerity of heart
with which you follow the truth and light
of our divine Redeemer.*

Recommended Radio:

KCSM 91.1 jazz and blues

KQKE 960AM Air America – Talk Radio from the Left

Recommended Movie:



What is the “church” doing to children in the name of “religion”. This controversial documentary presents one Bible camp, that liberals abhor and fundamentalists applaud. You decide what you think.

An in-your-face documentary out this weekend is raising eyebrows, raising hackles and raising questions about evangelizing to young people.

Speaking in tongues, weeping for salvation, praying for an end to abortion and worshipping a picture of President Bush — these are some of the activities at Pastor Becky Fischer's Bible camp in North Dakota, "Kids on Fire," subject of the provocative new documentary, "Jesus Camp."

"I want to see them as radically laying down their lives for the gospel as they are in Palestine, Pakistan and all those different places," Fisher said. "Because, excuse me, we have the truth."

"A lot of people die for God," one camper said, "and they're not afraid."

"We're kinda being trained to be warriors," said another, "only in a funner way."

The film has caused a split among evangelicals. Some say it's designed to demonize. Others have embraced it, including Fischer, who's helping promote the film.

"I never felt at any point that I was exploited," Fischer said.

"I think there is a push right now in a lot of evangelical churches to definitely keep the teenagers and keep the children in the faith," said Heidi Ewing, co-director of "Jesus Camp." "And this is one version of that attempt."

A Growing Movement

This camp is, by many accounts, a small — and perhaps extreme — slice of what some say is a growing, intensifying evangelical youth movement.

Over the past decade and a half, enrollment at Christian colleges is up 70 percent. Sales of Christian music are up 300 percent. Tens of thousands of youth pastors have been trained.

Young people are targeted through Christian music festivals, skateboard competitions and rodeos.

"This is an enormous youth movement," said Lauren Sandler, a secular, liberal feminist from New York City who spent months among the believers researching her new book, "Righteous."

Sandler says the evangelical youth movement will have a negative impact on the country's future, because even the most moderate young evangelicals are inflexible on issues such as abortion and gay marriage.

"It's an absolute, straight-up us-against-them," Sandler said. "It's, you're either with us or you're against us. ... Not only are you a sinner, but you are working for the enemy — the enemy being Satan."

Chap Clark, an associate professor at the Fuller Theological Seminary who's trained youth pastors for decades, said people who see "Jesus Camp" should not come away with the idea that evangelizing to youth consists mainly of political indoctrination.

Clark said youth pastors focus much more on providing meaning to kids who can't find it in a materialistic culture or in their family lives — "which is going to translate into much healthier adults who are more able to be into respectful dialogue and come alongside people who disagree with them.

"I think this is a very hopeful time because of the youth ministry movement," he added.

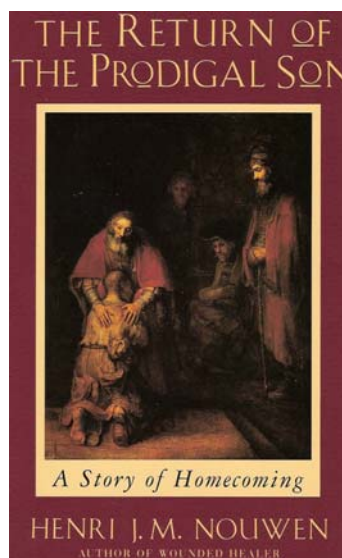
There's disagreement about whether this movement is good for the country and whether the movie is an accurate portrayal of the movement.

But there's growing agreement that these children will have a real impact. One child in "Jesus Camp" goes so far as to say, "We're a key generation to bringing Jesus back."

One review by a viewer: Their mouths were taped shut with "life" and they spoke in tongues. They were hysterical. Why are children crying for their sins. These little storm troopers are being

used by a whole generation of parents who lead pathetic and meaningless lives, who abuse resources, and who discredit science with illustrated versions of a bastardized bible. These children are not given the chance to be young. They have been swarmed by people who honestly believe that President Bush walks in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. This is a frightening reality for anyone who has traveled, at all, or who has a college degree. Jesus Camp should rally the rational to the voting precincts, for as they said in the piece: if the evangelicals vote, they determine the election. For those of us that value philosophy, good music, science, diversity, chaos theory, Jesus Camp is a must see. There are Christians and there are pentecostal, evangelical, indoctrinated savages who would just as soon destroy the earth than let a gay man hold public office.

Recommended Book:



A chance encounter with a reproduction of Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* catapulted Henri Nouwen on a long spiritual adventure. Here he shares the deeply personal and resonant meditation that led him to discover the place within where God has chosen to dwell.

In seizing the inspiration that came to him through Rembrandt's depiction of the powerful Gospel story, Henri Nouwen probes the several moments of the parable: the younger son's return, the father's restoration of sonship, the elder son's vengefulness, and the father's compassion. In his reflection on Rembrandt in light of his own life journey, the author evokes the powerful drama of the parable in a rich, captivating way that is sure to reverberate in the hearts of readers. The themes of homecoming, affirmation, and reconciliation will be newly discovered by all who have known loneliness, dejection, jealousy, or anger. The challenge to love as the father and be loved as the son will be seen as the ultimate revelation of the parable known to Christians throughout time, and here represented with a vigor and power fresh for our times.

For all who ask, "Where has my struggle led me?" or for those "on the road" who have had the courage to embark on the journey but seek the illumination of a known way and safe passage, this work will inspire and guide each time it is read.

Quote of the Month:

"War is as outmoded as cannibalism, chattel slavery, blood-feuds, and dueling, an insult to God and humanity...a daily crucifixion of Christ." Anonymous Wisdom