

Martha Phillips: People and Places

Sermon At Seekers, 17 August 1997

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People and Places

In about a month Danny and I will be going to China to meet our new daughter-in-law and her family. In preparation I have been pouring over maps, reading books on the history and customs of China and talking to anyone who's been to China. I want to know about this place that she belongs to. I look at her picture and try to imagine what she is like. I am most looking forward to exchanging stories about our children's lives. Knowing the history of a person or a people brings us into fellowship with them.

I have been a member of the Baptist tradition most of my life. My father was a minister in General Association of Regular Baptist, A group that is very Calvinistic in theology. Since the Baptist tradition is large and varied I gradually moved from the more restrictive forms to more moderate forms of the tradition. I have served in these churches in just about every capacity except what I am doing this morning. I reached a point where I was weary in well doing. I couldn't face going to church anymore, nor could I keep up the pace of frantic activity that I always had. I quit. I came across the book "Celebration of Disciplines" by Richard Foster, a Quaker. I started practicing some of the disciplines such as meditation and silence. These became meaningful; my prayer habits changed. I was anxious to learn how to use my abilities in a way that nurtured me and also connected with other people. I wanted a community to worship in. By becoming a seeker I found

Seekers.

We have been talking here at Seekers about belonging and what that means. I had read the core documents of Seekers. I thought I had a good understanding of what they meant but after the first meeting on belonging I felt like I needed to know more. I asked Hollis some questions about the history of the church and he started telling me about the Church of the Savior. He suggested that I read some of the books by Elizabeth O'Connor. I started reading "Journey Inward, Journey Outward " and "Call to Commitment." These stories in these books of how mission groups formed and how they accomplished such things as the Potter's House, Daysprings, Floc, Sarah's circle, etc. touched me in a personal way. Through reading the stories of the Church of the Savior I was able to catch the spirit of that tradition and feel a part of something bigger than myself. It was both exhilarating and sobering. The level of commitment and the attitude necessary to become a servant leader are serious calls for true vocation. Any commitment of this kind by it's very nature will call for sacrifice and for letting go of former places, former ways of doing things, old ideas. It was reassuring to know that if a mission failed it could be put to rest and the people involved could move onto other missions. When we have permission to fail, we can take more risk. What I had been missing from my former church life had been the development of the inner journey. I can see now that by strengthening ones inner journey through self knowledge and a close walk with the Savior one can engage in the outer journey more effectively. In community we can have support and accountability.

The Hebrew Scriptures are the stories and literature of a people. It is through their history that we come to understand the writings of the New Testament. This morning in our reading of the Hebrew Scriptures we have the death of David. David was a great leader. He had unified the 12 tribes into a nation and he had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Following

a lot of palace intrigue David had appointed Solomon to be his successor. You will remember that Solomon was not the first son. He was the son of David's relationship with Bathsheba. Solomon's position as King was not as solid as he would have liked. There were still factions within the kingdom that wanted the old way of life. If Solomon was to be as fortunate as his father David, he needed something. We have this famous story of Solomon asking for wisdom. In order to understand this story we need to go back to the history of the Israelites before the Monarchy. At this time Israel was a tribal confederacy. They were a society based on shared historical experiences and a covenant made with Yahweh the one true god. When danger arose or they had a conflict to settle there would rise up a judge from among the people, "a person upon whom the spirit of Yahweh rushed". The people could see that this person had certain personal qualities and they could see that he or she was of God. When Saul was elected as the first king of the Monarchy, it was said "the spirit of Yahweh rushed" upon him. Again, David "was a man after Gods own heart." It was said that "he was capable of inspired leadership." All the leaders during the tribal confederacy and the first kings of the monarchy were "charismatic leaders." Solomon was the first son of a king to succeed to the throne and it was for that reason that Solomon was asking for wisdom. He wanted to be in the position of his forefathers and have the "spirit of Yahweh rush upon him ." We see here that the wisdom Solomon asked for is not intellectual knowledge but the powers of discernment that had been exhibited by the judges and kings before him.

When we look at the passage from the New Testament in the Epistle of Ephesians, we see Paul admonishing the Ephesians to seek wisdom and make the most of their opportunities. This wisdom that Paul is talking about can only be understood in the light of the Hebrew scriptures. Paul is talking about the same kind of wisdom that the leaders of old had. This power they had of discernment, is the kind of wisdom we discover when we embark on the inner journey. Through a self knowledge

that is rooted in a relationship to God we can make the most of our gifts. Through practice of the disciplines we nourish ourselves. Coming together in community, we can use our gifts corporately to make the most of our opportunities. The community is a place of support and accountability.

I want to belong to this community. I need a place that I can feel comfortable enough from which I can take risk. I want to engage in the works of the church, practice the disciplines, and feel the support. Like everyone else I bring my gifts and also my fear and mistakes to this community. I've been so weary in well doing that I lost sight of my own gifts. I've had so many painful situations in my life that I find it hard to trust even when I find something good. There are days when I don't want to be one of God's people because being one of God's people can mean persecution, often by other Christians. I have been bored to tears by those claiming to know the joy of Jesus. On the other hand, I am thankful for two things that I hold dear from my childhood: the priesthood of the believer and the separation of church and state. With these two tenets of my faith I know I have the freedom of my own conscience and I can go forward and work for those things that I believe in.