

"A New Heaven and a New Earth" by Jackie McMakin

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Next week we will celebrate the ending of an era in the life of our church. We will say goodbye to our beloved headquarters building at 2025 Massachusetts Avenue and give thanks for all the wonderful things that happened there. Today I'd like to share some of the great things I learned at the Church of the Saviour, then apply these learnings to the world, and then end with some questions for us to ponder here at Seekers.

The idea of call was central. God calls each of us to build the Kingdom or the new heaven and earth, as today's Scripture says. What a wonderful way to live life. Our opening song says it perfectly: "You are like no other being, what you can give no other can give."

Training was essential to get in position to hear and heed the call. By the time I came to the Church of the Saviour in about 1962, I had four years of academic theological study under my belt. What I found in the School of Christian Living was something I wanted to devote my life to – sharing the life transforming aspects of faith. In the School, we not only studied, we did stuff. We learned to pray, to care for each other, to discern call, to live call. The system in those days was that you took the core required courses to learn the essential knowledge, behavior and skills needed to be a new heaven and earth person. This happened in the School. Then you graduated and focused your faith life in a mission group where training continued. A favorite training technique was reading a book in common. All the mission groups would read the same book, and not only read it, but practice what it said and be accountable for that practice. Gordon would cheer us on and lift us up with his sermons often based on the same book. We sat at the feet of the greats – Dietrich Bonhoeffer with *Life Together*, Romano Guardini with *Prayer*, and Walter Brueggeman and *The Prophetic Imagination*.

A third learning was the experience of corporate mission lived out through mission groups. During World War II, Gordon had been impressed with the camaraderie and skill of the GIs who would man a cannon together. He wanted that same enthusiasm, skill and professionalism to mark Kingdom builders.

Fourth, the way of the prophet was ingrained in us. According to Brueggeman, that meant three things:

*identify what grieved you,
form an alternative vision (how it would be if it worked
beautifully) and then
embody that alternative in some concrete way.*

That was the way to identify the piece of the action meant for you.

Finally, retreat. Silent retreat was an integral part of the Church of the Saviour. Whole hearted commitment to the value of silent retreat led to building Dayspring and going on annual retreat each year. What astounded me was how many major decisions – both personal and communal – came out of retreat. One personal example. Mary Cosby based a retreat on the suffering servant and asked, “Whose wounds do you feel called to heal?” I went up to her afterwards and said, “I feel called to heal the wounds between Catholics and Protestants.” At that time we were treating each other as enemies. She said, “How wonderful! Go do it!” I started a small community of Catholics and Protestants. We called ourselves the Partners Community. Our mission was to demonstrate “how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in harmony”. Now, many decades later, we are still going strong. This is my mission group.

In addition to this call, I have felt moved to apply the Church of the Saviour learnings in ever wider settings. Growing from the Partners Community was the non-profit Sonya Dyer and I ran – Working From the Heart – dedicated to helping

people in all walks of life from all faith traditions and none to create meaningful work and see that as an essential building block of a healthy society. Reading the book, *Working From the Heart* that came from this work, Mary Cosby said, "Jackie and Sonya, you have universalized what we have been teaching." Yes, that was our aim – to put it in secular language that everyone could embrace.

Recently in the Partners, we studied Rabbi Schachter's book *From Ageing-to-Sageing*. In it, he says that one job for elders is to "mentor the world." This encouraged me to apply the Church of the Saviour teachings to the world. Here's how that looks to me.

Call. We're now in a period of history where every single human being needs to awaken to our noblest calling: to care for one another and the earth.

Training. To respond fully to this call, we need training. We need to sit at the feet of the new saints and put into practice their wisest teachings. Here are some of the saints that speak to me:

On restructuring the economy and sustaining the earth: Al Gore and Lester Brown

On eradicating poverty: Jeffrey Sachs

On creating world structures that will serve the 21st century: J. F. Rischard

On teaching peace: Colman McCarthy and Richard Brady

In this training we need to learn new skills: how to live sustainably on the earth; how to build cultures of peace; how to help people in extreme poverty to start earning.

Common mission. If we are to build a new heaven and earth, we need to be working from the same page. Fortunately, that is possible. When the UN was founded, Eleanor Roosevelt led the way in crafting the Declaration of Human Rights. This still is a compelling menu of goals that must be achieved. It was heartening to see that these rights are written on the wall of the playground at the Miguel Asturias Academy in Guatemala which we sponsor. How terrific it would be if it were on the wall of every classroom around the world.

In addition to this Declaration, new efforts are being made to craft a global vision, goals and action plan. As Thomas Friedman observes, the world is flat. These new efforts are not hierarchical but participatory in nature. All of us can join in. The Earth Charter was created through a multi-year process involving thousands of individuals of diverse faiths, cultures and nationalities. It spells out the vision: to build a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century. The Earth Charter Initiative now is devoted to promoting the Charter as a key tool in building a healthy global society. The Coalition for the Global Commons has instituted a two year open consultation to create world goals and a common action plan in eight crucial areas.

With a click of the computer mouse, you can find the area that calls to you the most and contribute to the conversation.

The way of the prophet. Churn anguish into vision. Many now are in anguish over the state of the economy world-wide. What's an alternative vision to the western economic model – the fossil fuel-based, automobile-centered, throw away economy? It is to build a new economy, one that will be powered by renewable sources of energy, have a diversified transport system, and reuse and recycle everything. Now we

have a two sector economy – the public and the private. Peter Barnes, another one of my saints, suggests adding a third sector – the “commons” sector. The “commons” refers to assets owned by all people in common – the air, water, nature’s diversity. Barnes promotes setting up “Commons authorities” to hold commons assets in trust. For example there would be a sky trust, a water trust, and a land trust. Of course, we already have some land trusts. These trusts would sell permits to companies who pollute the atmosphere or ravage land. Revenues collected from these fees would then be used both for developing renewable energy and also for dividends to citizens as is done by the Alaska Permanent Fund.

And what about retreat? It is my observation today that many movers and shakers and even ordinary folks don’t have a whole lot of time to think, much less go on retreat. But there are two important segments of the population who have oodles of time for retreat – in fact, that is what they do. They are students and elders. Students have set aside a major 4 or more year period of time to do nothing but think, learn from the wisest thinkers, ponder their contribution. And many elders, particularly the growing baby boomer folks who are young vigorous elders, have major time, lots of experience, and sometimes money to explore new pursuits and put their talents to work in ways that are enjoyable and productive. What if we promoted conversations between the two groups? What a powerful combination of experience and energy that would be.

Now let’s think a bit about Seekers and our response to this powerful call to care for one another and the planet.

First, let me tell you where I am in all this. Last March, I

preached a sermon called "Toward a Global Renaissance." I defined Global Renaissance as a flourishing planet and people and offered a vision for four key areas: planet, poverty, peace, and purpose – the four P's. For each of the P's, I wrote two extra papers – a global action plan and individual action suggestions. After that sermon in the reflection time, Sandra, all fired up, said, "We could all send Jackie's papers around to our own address list and spread the word." This got me thinking. Even though Jeannine had kindly put my 8 action papers on the Seekers website with my sermon, I wanted to pull everything together into a more cohesive whole – a short readable booklet. I had hoped to finish this by today and to present you with copies of the booklet which is entitled *Our Defining Moment: A Call to Create the Future We Truly Want*. But alas, I'm still working on it. It should be ready any day and I'll bring them when they are ready. Jeannine who is equally passionate about all of this suggested that I create a website to distribute the booklet more widely. I am now the proud owner of www.theglobalrenaissance.org. It also is not ready yet, but should be shortly. Another friend suggested that I distill the essence of the booklet in a really short pamphlet. This is a great idea and is my next project. So that is where I am. Wildly excited by all of this and still honing the tools necessary to spread the word.

What about Seekers? Let's be grateful that we are a community that is doing lots to bring about a global renaissance. Our prayers, call statement, and group efforts are all about peace, poverty, the planet and purpose. But is there more we could do without succumbing to society's addiction to frantic living? Could we do what we already do differently? Could we study some things in common? Could we take some corporate action? These are questions to ponder.

There is an urgent challenge before us. Rain forests are drying up and polar ice caps are melting at record speed. It is possible to turn these trends around, but we must act now and act quickly.

Lester Brown says that saving civilization will take a massive mobilization, and at wartime speed. I am the last generation to have lived during World War II. I remember the mobilization vividly. Food was rationed, car travel for pleasure was banned, car companies were prohibited from making cars and produced trucks and tanks. The entire U. S. economy was turned around very quickly to produce the arms needed to win. Every citizen had a part. I remember pulling my wagon around the neighborhood and collecting tin cans for the war effort. Mom and Dad donned uniforms and went on the roof of Roosevelt School to spot enemy planes at night. Everyone had a Victory Garden to raise food. There was an exuberance in the air – that we could pull together and defeat a brutal enemy.

What would it look like if every church, mosque, individual and family were mobilized to defeat the enemies of economic and environmental collapse? This is the conversation I invite us to have. Specifically, what if Seekers led the way? What would we as a community look like or be doing if we were fully mobilized to create a truly healthy economy and environment?

This is Advent. As I read the Scriptures I am heartened. They speak of comfort. I take comfort in knowing that global living is healthy living and holy living. They say “justice and peace will kiss each other.” I think the writer thought this was possible on earth and so do I. They remind us of the vision of a new heaven and a new earth. These are ours to preserve and cherish. And they mention the specialness of living out of the Holy Spirit which is what we all want.

The World Council of Churches meets in Assembly every six years. Each gathering has a theme. The one before 1983 was "Jesus Christ the Hope of the World!" This was a declaration.

The one I attended in 1983 was held in Vancouver. Its theme modeled a different stance – one more open. It was a prayer spoken in a way that embraced all peoples and the planet.

Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation.