

As much as I remain concerned about current events, I confess I had grown weary of watching the news. All the hype and animosity was getting to me. So for months I was getting the bulk of my news via the newspapers and NPR. Then about a month ago, the miraculous survival of Gabrielle Giffords amidst the tragic deaths of six people in a Safeway parking lot in Tucson. And three weeks ago, Tunisia's uprising overturning decades of dictatorship. Less than two weeks ago, Egyptians gathering in the square to demand a change in leadership. I'm back to watching the news with its unfolding images of power, its stories of courage and hope and vision. Unarmed people camped in Tahrir—aka Liberty Square—in Cairo. Tanks. Rocks. Tens of thousands in prayer. Fire. Caring for the wounded. Anger. Pleading. Determination. Yet through all of the painful, violent realities, shafts of light.

Closer to home, I joined a number of UCC clergy at an interfaith clergy breakfast in Annapolis last Thursday. A Roman Catholic religious and priest, a Jewish rabbi, several evangelicals, as well as those of us from the spectrum of Protestantism spoke to the importance of passing legislation that prohibits discrimination based on gender orientation or gender identity, and legislation in support of marriage equality. Following the breakfast, many of us met with Maryland state legislators or their staff to make sure that religious voices were heard *supporting* these two pieces of legislation.

We each have our stories as to how we came to understand issues of racism and sexism and a host of other expressions of discrimination as issues of justice. By the time I began seminary in 1972, those issues of racism and sexism had permeated our national consciousness. The entire nation began to see how everything from our laws to our language affirmed and supported—or belittled and repressed—individuals as well as entire groups of people. There was a clear and compelling need to change personal attitudes and behaviors *and* legal and social structures. Those dynamics, that context, helped me hear differently when other issues of justice arose. *And*, the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young and our own very white, very middle class, local church pastor helped me hear differently those issues of justice issues of faith.

So when one of the seminarians already working as a youth minister in a local UCC church came out and openly affirmed his homosexuality, I personally had some work to do. For starters, I was naive. It simply had never occurred to me that I would personally know someone whose sexual orientation was different than mine, and I was even less aware that sexual orientation was a source of discrimination. From my place of relative privilege, the issue didn't appear on my radar. It was obvious, though, that if God could call me, a woman, to ordained ministry, there was no reason God couldn't call someone whose orientation was different than mine. Fortunately for me, another seminarian was a film maker, doing a documentary on the whole process of Bill Johnson's ordination. I had the good fortune to type the entire transcript on my portable Smith-Corona...a process that allowed me time to experience the challenges to old patterns and think through the theological foundations that preceded the Open and Affirming process by decades.

That experience laid the foundation for my presence at the Equality Maryland clergy breakfast and for my visits to the legislative offices. It's a national issue. Just Tuesday, the Iowa state House passed an amendment seeking to repeal the state's marriage equality law, and deny

any form of legal recognition for gay couples: same-sex marriage, civil unions, domestic partnerships. As you know from Dan's Mission Moment last week and from the *Spirit News*, legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or sexual identity, and legislation legalizing marriage equality are before our own legislature. I am very clear that my efforts and those of my colleagues don't require the same life-or-possible-death commitment of those in Tahrir Square, but I *do* believe they share the same fundamental character, if not the same degree of risk.

It's the character Jesus speaks of when he talks about his disciples being salt or light. We know about salt's role in flavoring and preserving food. It's a staple for any cook, as ubiquitous as eating utensils on a table or in a restaurant. It had an even bigger role in the ancient world. It is so essential an element that it often was part of a Roman soldier's allowance—it's the basis for our word *salary*; it was used to seal covenants, sprinkled on sacrifices, and rubbed on newborn children. It was a metaphor for wisdom for the ancients, and even today we refer to a person of great goodness and strength of character as the *salt* of the earth. With all its shades of meaning, the image of came to symbolize God's gracious activity. But if salt loses its saltiness, if it's no longer salt, it's a worthless white powder, thrown away and ground underfoot. The characteristics that make it salt make are the characteristics that identify what it is and what it does—the characteristics that give salt its purpose. The same is true with light.

By its very nature, light illuminates. We can shield ourselves from it, hide the light, even extinguish it, but the moment there is light, the area around that light is illuminated. Light can't help itself. It can't keep from providing illumination any more than salt can keep from being salty. Which is Jesus' point: a disciple follows Jesus even under hardship—otherwise, the follower isn't a disciple. As with salt and light, being a disciple combines both identity and purpose. To be a disciple of Jesus is to have identity as his disciple; to be a disciple of Jesus is to have purpose as a disciple.[1,107]

When I first joined the church as a confirmand, even the farthest reaches of my youthful imagination would not have taken me to picket lines for farmworkers, urban rallies for Civil Rights, the legislative halls of our state. But as John Robinson, pastor to the pilgrims, reminded the first pilgrims, there is yet more truth and light to break forth from God's holy word. May we each be guided by that light, that we may be the light to which we are called.

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[1]Craddock, Fred B., et al, *Preaching Through the Christian Year A*, Trinity Press International, © 1992.

[2] <http://www.lgbtqnation.com/2011/02/iowa-teen-gives-impassioned-speech-in-support-of-his-gay-parents/>