

## “Blessed Are The Heretics”

Rev. Annie Holmes

I know for many people that the word religion is a troublesome word, almost a dirty word because what religion has wrought on the world in the past, I am offering a way that I hope we can take the word back. Redefine it and give it new meaning. Because religion could be beautiful. Religion could be kind. Religion should be satisfying and open and ready to change as the seasons flow, so easily from one to another. Religion is what helped ancient peoples look around their world and with opened mouths be filled with awe and wonder at the gift of life. Popes and Bishops and Kings and evangelists have made a less than wonderful experience. Not the common person. Many have been the times in history when the flames of the punishment pyres have burned the flesh of people who would not conform to the particular flavor of the religion of its day. But that is not how it started out.

Why is the world in the state it is in today, except that we have forgotten how to be in awe, and have so readily allowed people to take stands about God. Identifications about something or someone we really don't know much about. Face it, we really, really do not know God. We only know what we think we can surmise from pure anthropomorphism. For the most part we have created a God out of our own image and likeness. And therefore it hasn't worked, either to blame God for all the bad stuff in someone's life, or to expect the God will take care of you because you do good deeds in the world. The whole system seems flawed and therefore, if we are to really, really to join our ranks with the heretics, those who chose to take stands in the past, we need to embrace again the old idea of religion, a religion that talks about binding those parts of our lives that are broken. Every time you forgive you are religious. When you pick up the phone and call someone you were having a problem with and you ask to meet and talk the situation out, you are being religious. The times you are patient once more in a situation that you feel has taken all your patience, you are a religious person.

Enough of the games of pretending we understand a squat about the holy or its influence on our lives or the world. That's what so much of the rhetorical theological discussions are about. Making believe, pretending we know about the things of the hereafter or the beyond or eternity. Glimpses. That is about all we really have. The canvass of our lives is there in front of us and it is covered by a cloth and for many of us only one tiny piece of a corner is ever revealed. And we believe we have the whole picture. Hah! I am reminded of the gadgets I own and know only 10% of all that they can do. I am so tired, after spending a lifetime of study and preaching and reading and talking with people, that humanity, as a race, we have moved so slowly to discovering the real true meaning of why we are here.

Religion should be uplifting. Saving. It should bring us closer together, not further apart. What has happened to us as a people on this earth? There are some deep seated notions that we have taken on maybe without questioning the legitimacy of their premise. We still think killing someone who has also killed is the right way to handle the situation and we call that justice. And we know in our heart of hearts, in the truth part of our solar plexus that that kind of revenge is poisonous and just plain wrong. We still think we can call an almighty being down to do our bidding, like some animal we have trained to do the heavy lifting. Gosh, how many years of enlightenment will it take for us to get it...any of it? By it I mean the truth. We still believe all

our dreams and fulfillments will be filled by the outside world. We still believe that money and things and possessions and toys and riches are the keys to happiness. We still strive to control people, the weather, the future. We are hopeless. At times I truly believe we are such a hopeless, lost and deluded people simply because we believe in all the wrong things. I'm ranting I know. But I am because I am so saddened, so angry, so confused about why since the middle ages of this world we have moved so slowly on the path to knowledge and true wisdom. We seem to have so little understanding of cause and effect. Ignore the leanings of truth for a life time and you will die unhappy.

I am reminded of Michael Jackson who like so many with wealth and fame and riches so often die alone, distraught and wholly confused. Couldn't he have had the whole of the greatest minds on how to live at his fingertips if someone had reached out the right, correct, true hand to him. And how many others can you name who have also lived with the ideas of thinking they understood life only to see that they were dry, barren and lost at the time of death because they put their trust in lies. Run from all the real and blessed truths and lo and behold when you need them, they are not there.

Religion, faith, spirituality, seeking a deeper life is a tiny bud, a shoot, a seedling inside each of us. And for so many in this world, that tiny bud is polluted before it even finds its first glimmer or growth. "Do what I say, not what I do," the tiny child is told and once again the personal power to ascertain, to know bull from truth is compromised. And so is their power source compromised. Overloaded with video games where you blow people and buildings up and destroy, destroy, destroy, we forget to walk outside and breathe. And we go to mechanical tools and technology for refuge and some semblance of power we know we should have, but haven't seen much of it displayed around us, so we really don't believe personal power exists.

We forget humility, gracefulness, peacefulness and gentleness are the real gateways to freedom and true ultimate power. And why have we forgotten? Because there is also a need, an urge, a surge, an excitement about power over. Gangs in the big cities. Corporate greed that eats away at everything that is holy and pure. Pollution and garbage on our roadways that makes me cry almost every time I drive home to Sutherlin on Hwy. 99. We just don't care as a people. We have given up. Our lives are overwhelmed with news and reviews and people on TV talking over each other to impress you on how smart they are. And they are not informers or even newscasters, they are vipers, leeches, lost souls drowning in their obsessions. Where is love? Where is the constant, day after day, year after year care of someone who is drooling in a bed, unable to feed themselves? I ask you, where is the love? Taking care of our children is the lowest paid position in this society. Catching a football or basketball is honored almost above all other feats of skill. Insane.

I find life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century sometimes almost insane. I go to books, even books that are supposed to be about spirituality and wholeness and health and so often I find drivel of the kind that baby's eat, because they can't handle real food. These authors are so impressed with their own one tiny piece of canvass they have managed to pull from the painting of their life, that they want praise and adulation and lots of money for their insights and big ideas. I am sick of it. And that, my friends is not religion. It is not the spirit. It is not truth. Power-over and pollution and controlling everything around you, is not religion. It is false. It is a lie. And we make ourselves feel better about what is not being done in the world by hiding in movies and novels and crafts and closing our curtains and pretending. That is not religion.

I don't like saying any of these things. Believe me no one likes a prophet. Isaiah, or Ezekiel or Jeremiah were not people anyone asked over for dinner. They were people you wanted to shut up and put away. They pricked at your conscience and made you see things about life you really didn't want to see. But I can't stop the sadness I feel when I see people so easily handing over their religious freedom to people who claim to have the truth, but are instead are only trying to control whole pieces of society. They suck the very life out of people by continually yelling at them that they are born evil and unable to do any good without the help of ...what? You fill in the blank.

Are we as a people getting better? Is humanity more humane now than 100, 1,000, 5,000 years ago? Watching the remake of "True Grit" I wonder. According to the movie a person's life had so little meaning in the old West. People were hanged, shot, dismissed so easily. The movie was trying to be authentic and I was reminded once again with the premise of the movie, a 14 year old girl searching for the man who murdered her father and all she wants to do is make sure he is killed. And in the end she does shoot him. There we go, I thought. And why was that worthy to be a movie? What made that premise once again of vengeance and revenge a reason worthy of my watching it? And why are there not more movies, stories, novels, songs about how to forgive. How to let go of revenge and hate and just simply do things in another way? But with malice and forethought we as a people, a humanity, still seek ways of somehow balancing a unbalanceable spread sheet of lives taken and lives lost.

Year after year, generation after generation we continue the idea that God is our plaything to do with what we will. If we see something and we want it we should have it; health, wealth, safety. There are two disparate thoughts constantly going through our minds. Love, even tough love will always be better than hate. And we hear and see and have experienced that power over is better than power shared. Because of the TV and movies most of us have been exposed to, we have watched over 100,000 murders in our life time. What impact do you think that has upon us and our sensibilities? How are you different because you have seen that many people killed, often in the greatest brutality that the motion picture people allow, than let's say your great Grandmother or Grandfather? Are you more loving, sensitive, motivated to be a blessing to the world because you have exposed yourself to rape and murder and whatever?

The world is a mess. I am convinced. And what could save us from too much; too much indulgence, too much violence, over and over and over? I am convinced that the heretics understanding of truth is what brings our world again and again back to truth. May we not be too afraid to listen to the heretics, because they were the ones who chose, who made a decision to not follow the ecclesiastic clad lemmings off the cliff. We could be so thankful that in the mess we find ourselves, there are leaders who will show us a different way to live.

Each one of these people said no to something that was professed as truth in their life time. And they said yes to something often a very unpopular idea but truth nonetheless. They fought the good fight against odds that are as insurmountable as ours seem to be. They were not particularly smart people or braver than any of us. But they were sure. They were sure that what they were given as the way life was supposed to be, had within it the smell of untruth. And instead of hiding and letting it go, they stood up and made a difference by being honest. That's all, just simply honest. And we are all the better for their honesty.

**Meg Christian** came out as a lesbian in the late 60's. Meg said no to her Southern culture that would not allow people to be gay. She said yes rather to her inner urgings that opened her life up to not only being who she was a woman who loved women, but also a career as a song writer and singer that launched an industry that carried with it, the possibilities of healing and helping others including myself be brave, who needed to know they were not alone in their efforts to be themselves, in other words – gay.

**Prudence Crandall** said no to a society that wouldn't allow black children to be educated. She said yes she would educate anyone who came to her, by building a school where black women could learn to read and write and become independent.

World War I pacifist **John Haynes Holmes**. John lived from 1879 – 1964. This Unitarian educator said no to racism and war and said yes to changing his society by co-founding the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union.

**Siddhartha Gautama** said no to the Hindu idea that people must for unknown lifetimes be on the wheel of karma. He said yes to the possibility that souls could find enlightenment in this lifetime by becoming the Buddha and showing us how it could be done.

**Charles Darwin** said no to the insistence that the story of Genesis was the only way to look at the beginnings of life. He said yes to the theory of evolution that has brought the human race face to face with science as an alternative to the Bible for answers in life.

**Galileo** said no to the authorities who insisted because they saw the heavens one way that must be the way things are. Rather he said yes to what was really happening and changed the course of how we view the universe.

**Pope John XXIII** said no to his Catholic Church and their insistence on remaining the way it had always been, a religion set in stone. Instead he said yes to the Vatican Council that began the dialogue of true ecumenism between Christians, allowed the mass to be said in the vernacular of the country and finally allowing the Jewish people the freedom of the liability of Jesus' death.

**Malcolm X** said no to the racists who insisted that anything black was evil and wicked, including Black men and said no to the Black Muslims who taught the white man was the devil. As he said yes to opening up the idea of Islam to include discussions with all people of all colors, he was murdered to stop his message.

These are a few of the people who I feel have helped our little humanity move to better ways of living. These people were not over paid athletes, or movie or rock stars. Instead they were people like you and me. They were aware, awake and brave. I am calling all of you to also be heretics in your own right. What that means is when you see an injustice, a blatant lie, a falsehood passed off as truth you say no. But remember saying no is not enough. As a true heretic you need to say yes to something else.

Whenever you do something that is kind or thoughtful, patient or forbearing, whenever love is in the equation of the your actions, your words; you are sowing the true seeds of true religion. Religion in its best sense. It's powerful sense. Like David of the Bible story we don't often feel we have much with which to meet the foes of goodness, kindness, generosity and peace. Because I don't want to feel this way anymore, this way of depression and helplessness and

hopelessness and despair and doom and gloom, I will try, if you will try also, be true to the truth: Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" If Pilate asked you that question today, how would you answer him? The heretics I talked about today were pretty clear on their truth. And that clarity is what made their lives so outstanding and an inspiration to all of us. Can we be clear? So, with the accumulation of all your years of life, what have you discovered is truth and how do you live it out in your relationships, in Bi-Mart, in the kitchen, in everyday life? I am going to sit down right here in the front of church after the closing song and hope you will come and share with any who are willing, your answer to the question: what is truth for you.