

Now is the acceptable time ... at Kairos CoMotion

Sharon Zimmerman Rader

February 23, 2002

"Pay attention." So began Sharon Zimmerman Rader, United Methodist bishop of the Wisconsin Area.

Rader expressed gratitude for the Kairos CoMotion event which invites us to "pay attention to the 21st century in which we live; pay attention to the traditions which have shaped and misshaped us; pay attention to each other; pay attention to our selves; pay attention to God; pay attention to the power of the community."

The biblical story of Esther shaped Rader's sermon. The plot thickened when Haman "felt the need to kill all those people who wouldn't, couldn't bow down and conform to his world view. The rest of the book tells how Esther risked her own life to save the lives of those people, her people who were about to be killed."

The tension Esther found herself in was being warned not to enter the presence of the king without invitation and her uncle Mordecai asking her to go to the king with the encouragement, "It could be that you were made queen for a time like this."

Rader says, "We've been warned. We've been warned not to tell anyone. And we've obeyed. We've been warned not to make people uncomfortable about how they spend their money or waste their time. We've been warned not to challenge our government for its unjust economy or its military policies. We've been warned not to talk openly about sexuality. We've been warned not to say that the *Book of Discipline* is sometimes incompatible with Christian teaching. We've been warned not to tell that we are gay or lesbian. We've been warned."

"The laws have been written," said Rader, "and they put us at risk. The people with power are anxious that those not like them stay in their place, bow down appropriately in gratitude for the crumbs. Or, worse, the law keeps some away, drive others out, shun some in their midst. There are some who are making money, gaining prestige and boosting their own ego at the expense of those who are most vulnerable."

"Some among us," Rader continued, "have spent lots of time weeping and wailing about this situation. But, it hasn't much changed the reality for the vulnerable, the oppressed, the hurting."

Even this Kairos CoMotion event may not change the world very much, said Rader.

Rader agreed with Dennis Jacobson, Lutheran pastor in Milwaukee who writes, "The world as it is will not be essentially changed until the end times.... To come out of Babylon is not to make Babylon fall. The ability to make Babylon fall is essentially beyond human capacity.... Babylon, the world as it is, co-opts religion for its own purposes. The world as an enemy of God, and under the judgment of God, is, ironically, loved by God. The world will be redeemed.

"The status of the faithful Christian," Rader continued from Jacobson, "is always one of being an alien in a strange land. Always feeling unease with the dis-ease of the culture. To come out of Babylon is to live in a constant state of resistance to the -isms. To come out of Babylon is to connect with a community of faith and faithfulness. To come out of Babylon is to act in accordance with one's conscience. To come out of Babylon is to be confronted with one's own power of possibility. "

Esther was chosen for her beauty, not her mind, said Rader. "She was in a land not her own, dependent upon others she could not be certain were trustworthy and yet she stood at a threshold moment in history. The prophetic words of Mordecai to Esther serve as a call for discernment. Perhaps God has brought us to this moment for such a time as this - a Kairos moment."

"We are being challenged," Rader said, "to use this opportunity for good, to be stewards of the moment given to us, to take risks big and small, in order to be faithful to our God and to each other. As Christians we take up the Jesus walk. We live with people Jesus lives with. We challenge the systems Jesus challenges. We focus on the God in which Jesus found purpose and meaning."

Rader called the participants to take a step into this new 21st century day God has given us, to take a step into yourself and your own integrity, and to take a step into mystery and the unexpected surprises of the next moments.

As in the story of Esther, we are called to pray, to fast, to act and not to do it alone.

"I believe," Rader asserted, "progressive Christians have been silent too long. Everybody else tells us what religion

is. It is time for us to speak our understanding of religion."

"The purpose of this event is to build community so we can do what we believe needs to be done. We need to join together and we need to invite others to join with us in an effort toward greater justice, hope, reconciliation. And we will live in the tension, the tension that is always present in our midst, between conscience and compromise, between faithfulness and effectiveness, between morality and expediency, between prophetic and practical, between the world as it should be and the world as it is. We came in the tension, we go out in the tension. The tension is our home."

Mordecai says to Esther, "Don't think that you will escape just because you live in the king's palace. It could be that you were made for a time like this." All through her sermon, Rader indicated that this life transforming line is also being offered to 21st century people and we can't avoid it by trying to live out of any previous world view.

And so we went out to live in the tension of both parts of the verse we sang with Holly Near the night before, "We are a gentle angry people and we are singing, singing for our lives."

Following Rader's sermon we prayed and sang and received a balm of healing and a sign of hope - the shards that were used in our first worship service were found to have been transformed into leaves, the leaves of the tree in Revelation which are used for the healing of creation. With this sign of healing around our necks and a *Song of Hope* on our lips ("Praying, let us work for peace; singing, share our joy with all; working for a world that's new, faithful when we hear Christ's call") Kairos CoMotion ended as an event and the participants went forth to scatter the joyful and living seed of being a Christian in the 21st century.