

Living Stones at Kairos CoMotion

Judith Craig

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MADISON, WI - More than 300 progressive Christians heard Judith Craig, retired United Methodist Bishop, speak to the importance of living in the tension of the image, "living stones." Craig invited participants into her "quest after a faith appropriate for our times."

Reflecting on her inability to learn to skate backwards, she was told that she defied the laws of physics and, along with keynote speaker John Spong, retired Episcopal Bishop, she is looking at what it means to "defy the laws of metaphysics."

"Living Stones," said Craig, "doesn't make any sense if you take it literally." The question it raises holds in tension "God doing a new thing" and the orthodoxies of the past which have brought us this far.

The struggle to cut free from the limitations of orthodoxies leaves Craig feeling "a little bit alienated in my land of church." She is encouraged that "it is in community that one finds endurance for standing over against.... We can claim our citizenship in the very community with which we tussle - whose claims and creeds and doctrines have formed us and from which we now seek liberation and for which we seek re-formation."

Craig indicated we become "living stones" by "becoming who we study." So she values the God experiences and theological frameworks which have formed us. She values these anchoring points and the way in which they also leave us free to explore a wide array of possibilities without wrecking us on the shoals of self-destruction. This freedom leaves the contemporary searcher open to the charge of heresy and apostasy from those who believe that the faith must be the same for all time.

Craig reminded the audience of Kathleen Norris' comment that "Heresy is what keeps orthodoxy alive.... The vigorous rooting out of heresy is a cure worse than the disease.... When the inquisitorial attacks have gotten the upper hand they have proved to be irredeemably shameful and sometimes horrific."

"We walk a fine line," said Craig, "for we are saying of the tradition and orthodoxy that it is the heresy, while the adherents of orthodoxy are saying the search and searchers are heretical. What is heresy but a challenge to tradition, an invitation to fresh thinking, an availing of the best intellectual means of discernment available."

"I think it is harder, said Craig, "to be a living stone looking for the new thing God is revealing than it is to be in solid, sure pathways that don't require the searching through the unfamiliar."

For Craig, a key to searching is community. "When we are struggling against the community of the church we need to stay close-in and deal with it close-up. Running away will not create the hope, enlightenment, reformation for which we reach and search."

"How many ways are there to tell the story of the work of God in the world?" asked Craig. "More than you and I can announce, more than you and I can imagine, and certainly more than you or I have learned, yet there remains a struggle in the community of which we are a part.... There is a pull between continuity and discontinuity, between particularity and diversity, between the old and the emerging, the constant and the reforming, the bulwark and the birthing."

"The early church," reflected Craig, "understood itself as a counter-culture. Claiming the early church comprehension of being counter-culture and the Wesleyan heritage of transforming culture may be the antidote to church blahs." She concluded, "living stones can claim those concepts - counter-culture, transformation of culture - and make them our current credo."

According to Craig, "It is more demanding to create a movement than to live in an institution.... But for me that is the call of Jesus, a journey that makes sense in my time and place, building on the teachings that have brought me thus far, but not resting on them as if they are all I need."

Kairos CoMotion participants affirmed this journey with Jesus with laughter and applause. With these words from Craig the workshops began to make the Jesus story practical for our time and place. The workshops looked at choosing life. The issues worked on were:

- being a passionate leader in an institution with conformist and lockstep tendencies,
- finding the path of economic justice in a consumer-oriented society of affluence,
- responding to the challenge of a church officially conflicted about human sexuality,

- looking beyond Christian denominationalism to find connections between people,
- finding more effective ways to aid the church become intentionally open and inclusive,
- seeing a way through early scriptural explanations of an experience of God to looking anew at the prophets and parables,
- finding ways to take this heady stuff and bring it into the actual living rooms of ordinary people,
- dealing with the painful truths of racism,
- working on the emotional cost of making transitions from old ways to new ways of living.