

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

God Moved Through That Town

Exodus 23:9 - "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

For days I carried a mixture of feelings and thoughts about the rally. As I drove to Postville last Sunday, the mix of emotions continued. There was little way of knowing what to expect - and in my heart I knew that my reluctance was due to not knowing what might be at stake for me if I went. Still, in my deepest heart, I knew I needed to be there. Now, having heard the prayers, having listened to the speakers, having seen the hope and joy and caring in the faces of a huge crowd whose diversity speaks well of God's amazing creative power, I'm so glad I went. In fact, I've told people that knowing what I know now I would be glad to drive 500 miles and pay \$300 for the chance to "do it again."

I think we can all agree that something has been - and is - terribly wrong with the picture in Postville. But Postville is just one snap-shot in a huge album of troublesome pictures. Forgetting for a moment what's going on throughout the world, in this hemisphere alone countless people - most of whom want nothing more than to provide for their families - countless people are risking life and personal liberty to travel thousands of miles knowing only that there's a chance - a chance - they can make enough money to have a meaningful life.

Those of us who are rich don't have a clue what it's like to be poor in today's world. We really don't. Perhaps we were poor 50 years ago - but that was a long time ago. Now the world is more like it was when our ancestors fled their homelands in the hopes that they might have a more meaningful life in this part of Iowa. Whether we became rich because we undeservedly inherited wealth; because we were born into families that provided lots of private welfare for us in our youth; or because we've worked very hard and very long to make sure our grain-bins are filled to the brim, we find the thought of extending the opportunities we had to "aliens" to be something of a threat - and we may not even be sure why we feel that way. We're afraid that if we lose our wealth, our lives will slide into the abyss.

Those of us who are poor don't have a clue what it's like to be rich in today's world. Our vision of "prosperity" has been skewed by the media - as so much has been. Many of us have been so poor for so long that we've come to believe that poverty is normal; that sleeping with 8-10 people in a one-bedroom apartment is tolerable; that it's acceptable for our young daughters to work 16-17 hours a day so our sons can get educations. We'd probably be angry that we're working hard and long only to fall further behind - except we're too tired to be angry. And our families have been put-down for hundreds of years. Yes, hundreds of years. We've never learned about wealth. And we're way beyond angry

and tired. All we have left is hope. We're afraid that if we lose our hope, our lives will slide into the abyss.

Long ago millions of people from Europe came to this continent, bringing with them hopes and dreams like you and I have known. Did they come here legally? Not according to the majority of people who were living here - the Native Americans. But they came anyway. They wanted better lives for their children. Many of our ancestors sent money back home - with news that this was a good place to live. So they kept on coming - and it didn't matter (to them) what the people who were here thought.

Now millions of people from Central and South America are coming to this continent bringing the same hopes and dreams. Millions of them. Are they coming here legally? Not according to the majority of people who are living here - the Recent Americans. But they're coming anyway. They want better lives for their children. Many of them send money back home - with news that this is a good place to live. So they keep on coming - and it doesn't matter (to them) what the people who are here think.

Something is terribly wrong with the picture in Postville. Good people have been trying to do what's right, and fair, and just. Yes, there are those who have exploited people. And there are those who think the answer is a simple one: just get rid of those who aren't like them and everything will be OK. But it's not that simple, and none of us know what The Answer will be.

We do know this, however: God has NEVER looked kindly on the rich exploiting the poor. What's more, God has ALWAYS looked kindly on the poor in their suffering, and provided help to them. It may not come overnight. It may not come in time for some of those who are oppressed. But when it comes, it comes with a vengeance against those who sit-on-their-hands while faithful people suffer.

Exodus 23:9 - "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

Faithful people who "know the heart of an alien" because they remember... those people were in abundance at Postville last Sunday.

I'm glad I marched. And prayed. And sang. I really am.

If you weren't there you missed a glimpse of God moving through that town.

- Pastor Jim Klosterboer