

MORNING INTERFAITH REFLECTIONS

(Each morning the participants took turns sharing a brief interfaith reflection. Through this reflection we could learn how we believe our religion teaches justice and peace. Below is a small collections of some of these morning reflections)

Love One Another As I Have Loved You (John 13:31-35)

By Peter from Karenni State, Burma

Shortly before he is arrested, on the night before he was killed, Jesus tells his disciples a new commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you." I want to say three things about this beautiful Gospel verse--the commandment, the condition of the commandment, and the outcome of the commandment.

This is Jesus' last message, his last words, the last important instruction for us. This is what we are supposed to do: love one another. Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "It sure would be nice if you loved one another." He doesn't say, "Perhaps you might think of loving one another." He doesn't say, "At least, love the people who are nice to you." He says, "This is a new commandment I give you: Love one another." That's that. Instead of the ten commandments, instead of "Thou shalt not," he says, "Thou shalt love one another." This is the job description for the rest of our lives. This is the work before us.

I think that love is like a road. Love is a path. There are many roads and paths we can take, but if we follow Jesus, we walk one road, one path: the road of love. The road of love leads to life, which means it is a way of life. It also means love has boundaries. On the road of love, some behavior is no longer permissible.

We saw the horrific photos of the U.S. soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners, a horrific crime, but the whole U.S. war on Iraq is a crime against God and a violation of the new commandment of Jesus because we've killed thousands of women, children and men. So we have to pray and speak out non-stop for an end to this unjust, evil war, that all the killings and violence stop, that the U.S. soldiers return home immediately, that our government war criminals be tried, that the United Nations resolve the entire crisis, and that we abolish our weapons of mass destruction. The reason why we stand against violence and war is because of this Gospel verse, because we are "commanded" to love one another. We can't support the war and love one another at the same time. It's one or the other. We are people who walk the road of love, which means we do not walk the road of war. We go against U.S. warmaking, torture, executions and nuclear weapons.

The second thing to notice is that there is a condition to the commandment. The key to the commandment to love one another is the phrase "as I have loved you." We have to love as Jesus loved. How did he love? He gave his life for people. He served people. He helped people. He healed people. He fed people. He liberated people. He taught people. He encouraged people. He blessed people. He prayed for people. He felt compassion for people. He forgave people. He was nonviolent toward people. He resisted evil for people. He laid down his life in love for everyone and he says to us, "Now you go and do the same thing. Love others as I have loved you." It's a great

challenge, but it's also the best way to live, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus on the road of love, trying to love as Jesus loved us.

Finally, notice the outcome of the commandment: "If you love one another as I have loved you, then you will be my disciples and everyone will know that you are my disciples." So the measure of our discipleship to Jesus is not whether or not we are popular or successful or law-abiding or rich or patriotic; not whether or not we support our country; not whether or not we did what everyone else did--but whether or not we love one another.

You do this well so you are disciples of Jesus and I want to encourage you to keep on loving one another, to love everyone in your family, to love everyone in town, to love the people you don't like, to love everyone you will ever meet, to love every human being on the planet, to love the people the government tells us we're not supposed to love, and to refuse to go along with the culture of hate and indifference and fear and violence and war. One day, when we reach the end of the road of love, we will be welcomed home into the house of love, as we hear in the book of Revelation, where there are no more tears, no more suffering, no more pain, no more violence, no more empires, no more wars, no more nuclear weapons, and no more death, and we will be ready to spend eternity in the land of love because we know how to love one another.

Interfaith reflection on Buddhism

Nang (Shan State, Burma)

Long long ago, in our Buddhist religion we have to get up early morning 4 o'clock, cook good food and go to the monastery and offer to the monks. There was one mother who has a baby girl and when she prepares the food the baby is crying because she is hungry. The mother thought that if she gives the food to the baby first instead if the monk, it is not good. She thinks that she has to offer to the Buddha first because the Buddha is the great person. But when she offers to the Buddha, he didn't accept that food and said to her, "I am not important so give food to the baby first because she is hungry." Then the mother went back and fed her child. After that she offers to the Buddha and the monks accept that food.

This is my reflection. You already see the Buddha that he didn't need anything and sits under the tree to meditate. He does not need good house and good facilities. This is the Buddha's teaching. But now in Burma situation if you go to the monastery you have to give something to the monks which is expensive. If we plant in our garden we have to give the best thing from that garden to the monk. If you are not giving the best to the monk, you will poor in the next life. And if you give more and more next life you will be more rich and rich. This belief makes people poor and poor. But Buddha does not teach like this, but most of the Burmese monks teach like this.

In our culture one year we have to make the boy to dress like monk and it take seven days. We have to spend a lot of money. This celebration makes to spend a lot of money. The people would like to make their son like this so that they could get blessing. They don't have money but they have to borrow from the other and this make the people poor and poor. And they have debt year by year and they can't pay back because of high interest. For my reflection, religious practices also can oppression to people if we do not careful about our interpretation.

The worth of forgiveness in Islam

Matu, Thailand

When we do something wrong or some mistake it is very easy to “sorry”. And if that mistake it is become bigger. It is not too hard if we will say “forgive me” with the close people, or some friends. But if we will say with someone who we do something a big mistake and it is not easy to forgive us, it is so hard.

In my relative family have some problems between brothers. Someone doesn't like another one. For example my uncle's wife doesn't like my aunt-in-law. That effect to my two uncles. It will be a little bit conflict between each others. They do not say anything with each others. So many families have a problem like this. Even though we were young we have some conflicts and maybe continue to violence, we hit each others. That are natural, and we came back to each other again. That is so easy when we were young. But when elder people they have some conflict it very difficult to solve, even though their parents, they cannot solve. Sometime it is between husband and wife. Sometime it is between parents and their son or daughter. It may because of ego, rigidity or arrogance

How can we do?

Every year in Islam we have two days for a big ceremony. We call Eidil Fitri and Eidil Adha. The first eid is Eidil Fitri is the first day after Ramadan one month in Islam calendar. On Ramadan month we fast in the day time and eat in the night time. And the second eid is Eidil Adha is during the Hajj one of religious activities.

On these two days Muslim forgive everyone in everything. We go to see our relative family. We usually start with older people sometime they give us some money or some gifts and we will go to see the people who are younger than them and our friends and everyone we see, in the mosque, on the street, everywhere. We will touch the hands of each other with our two hands if someone have no hand it is no problem. Some the younger people kiss the elder's hand while they touch the hands each others. And we always say “selamat hari raya” and “forgive me” and another one will say “forgive me too” or “me too”. For me this is very strong word it is very difficult for many people to say. It is like we do something it is very bad, very big fault, very big mistake. Because we always use “I'm sorry”. For me it is common word when we do something it is not so big mistake.

These two days can remake a very good relationship between them again. It may because people in society, community everyone do that thing. It is like you can confident in another one that they are waiting some words from you and they will be response on your words.

When I say that word with my parents, grandmother and grandfather, or elder's people I always cry. Because I feel with something that I did and after that or that time I feel very bad, but I can say nothing. Maybe because rigidity. It is sadder and more crying when my parents especially my mom said “please, forgive me for my mistake”. I miss my mom even though I can call my mom every day. And we give a big hug for each others.

Now a day, I salam (touch each other the hands) and kiss their hands every time when I go back to my home because I work in the city but it is not so far around 30 kms or around 30 minutes. And when I will be back to my work sometime my mom says “please, forgive me” and I always will get cry. And I never hate my mom in the long time. Yes, sometime I get angry with something but she is mother.

Forgiveness is very hard especially with a big mistake. We can challenge ourselves by decrease rigidity, our ego. Something we need society or community to help us and that thing can make acceptance for people in society or community.

The story of Yosathon and Ammana (Islam)

Sukkriya, Thailand

Yosathon has an older sister. Her eldest brother had to leave school to stay home. The second sister had leukemia. Yosathon’s father, Vichit, made a living selling sweets and fruits at a tiny roadside stall.

One evening, two motorcycle riders drove by the stall. Yosathon wasn’t paying particular attention just enough to see his father put bread into a bag and hand it to the two men. Then gunshots rang out. Yosathon saw his father drop to the ground in a pool of blood, right there in front of their home. Father did not die, but from that day he could not take his children to school any more. He was paralyzed. He needed mother and the children to help him get up or sit down. At night he would be startled at the sound of a motorcycle.

Ammana is 8 years old. Her sister was 13. Ammana’s father, Matalifi, is a veteran. Ammana remembers it was late at night-everyone had gone to bed and the lights were out. She was startled awake when a large group of men broke down the door and stormed into the house. Ammana saw the men restrain her father and ask him in Thai “Where did you put the stolen guns?” Father said he didn’t know and the ten men beat him up. At night they dragged him into a vehicle. Three days later the news was that someone found her father’s body dumped on the roadside. He had burns from electric shocks and his nose was broken. Mother told those who visited her “I’m so afraid I can’t be any more afraid than this. I can only tell myself that no matter how afraid I am, if they want to kill us, they can kill us anyway.”

It is not difficult to guess how Yosathon and Ammana must have felt. Yosathon probably wants to console his father but does not know how. He probably wants to feel sorry for his father and mother for having to bear such a heavy burden and his father to be like this.

He does not understand what father did to deserve this. Yosathon may therefore be full of anger and hatred toward the men who shot his father. Both of these children might not be different in their feelings for their mothers and hatred toward the men who killed or wounded their fathers.

What is alarming is that the number of such children as these two are increasing in number everyday and scenes of violent incidents like this happen daily.

The press has indicated that in the 3 southern border provinces of Thailand, several thousand children have been orphaned as a result of violence. What is the future of these children? If they are bound together in love and friendship no matter how much violence exists society will remain strong. But if they grow up with anger and hatred in their hearts or are merely indifferent to the plight of their fellow citizens, society will be darkened with clouds of violence. Then no number of guns or amount of force will be able to restore peace and tranquility to society.

Interfaith Reflection from Christian Perspective

Lioni, Indonesia

We live 7 days a week which is equal with 168 hours. Let's say that God has given us 168 hours a week to live. We put use a piece of ribbon to explain. God gives us a 168 cm ribbon.

So 168 hours = 168 cm. Let's count our activities.

We sleep for a week $8 \times 7 = 56$ hours = 56 cm

We spend for eating $3 \times 7 = 21$ hours = 21 cm

Work takes $8 \times 7 = 56$ hours = 56 cm

Movie, reading, relaxing uses $3 \times 7 = 21$ hours = 21 cm

Leisure time on the weekend is 12 hours = 12 cm

Total time spent is 168 hours = 168 cm. How many hours/cm that we spend to our God?

NONE.

Sometimes we forget to give some time to God. Even only 0,5 cm.

What I'm trying to say here, I'm not pushing you to pray, go to the church or something else to give some time to God. No. But at least you have time to see around you. God is everywhere. You can spend time with the oppressed people, with the poor people, with the street children. God will be there.. you will see.