

**September 19/20, 2009**

**Romans 15:1-7**

**What If ... We Took Seriously the Needs of the World?**

**Rev. Susan Bresser**

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours,  
no feet but yours,  
yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion  
is to look out to the earth,  
yours are the feet by which He is to go about doing good  
and yours are the hands by which He is to bless us now.  
- St. Teresa of Avila, 16<sup>th</sup> century

What if we took seriously the needs of the world? I suppose you'd like to know the needs of the world before you make a decision if you're going to take them seriously?

According to the Copenhagen Consensus Center, an organization, a think-tank, that prioritizes global needs, here are top 10 needs of the world ... the top 10 challenges, the top 10 problems:

Global Warming  
Diseases  
Conflicts/War  
Education  
Air Pollution  
Terrorism  
Women & Development  
Sanitation & Water  
Subsidies & Trade Barriers  
Malnutrition & Hunger

Maybe you don't agree that this is the top 10 – maybe you'd take away or add something different if you had to prioritize – but you do have to admit the chosen ten are very much a part of our world. The CCC meets every 4 years to determine the world's biggest needs and then determines how much it would cost to implement a solution. It estimates that \$40 – \$70 bn is needed annually on top of the \$57 bn already spent every year on finding a solution.

Wow. That's overwhelming. These global crises really make me feel quite small. How do I reconcile this – all this – in my life of faith? How do I reconcile this – all this – with my own struggles; my own *trying to make right my little place in the world*? How do you reconcile all this in your little world?

We conduct a test every year with the confirmation class ... it's actually a little experiment. When talking about crises in our world, we ask the question, "Do we need a Savior?" We discuss the tension in the world and usually come up with another question: If we need a Savior, where is he?

By simple virtue of sitting where we do this afternoon/morning, we make the statement that we have recognized the need for a Savior. Every week, right here, we proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. We sing songs, we listen to the Word, we offer prayers and we come together – every week – to search for more effective ways to teach and preach and live the truth as we believe it, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.

And then we go home. And we face turmoil, tension, anxiety, and apprehension. We are challenged feelings of unworthiness, unfaithfulness, and insecurity. Who is innocent of doubt? We experience disappointment, anger, hurt, and loss, and we ask: Where are you, Jesus?

We then we watch the news. Another child abducted. Another fire. Another war. More casualties. Another news conference with the president. More economic strain. Another flood. Another drought. Another murder. More injustice and corruption. We haven't even made it to the sports yet. As we turn off the television, we ask: "where are you, Jesus?"

We have buried children in this place: infants and teenagers. We know and love good, faithful parents whose children have died and we shake our fist into the air and we ask: "where are you, Jesus?" And then we watch as community gathers to grieve and then we watch as community gathers to offer nourishment and nurturing in the form of food & company; love and kindness in the form of human touch; support and solidarity in raising money and awareness to memorialize a life that has left us too soon. Hmmm ... where is Jesus?

We shake our fists and ask "where are you, Jesus?" when we confront poverty. And for many of us in this place, we confront poverty with a 10-ft pole ... it's a part of our world, but we don't live it. And yet when we as church confront poverty, we come together to go on mission trips, stuff backpacks, build homes, tutor children, collect diapers, support community ministry, fill food pantry shelves, sustain ministries that offer services for

addiction, homelessness, and mental illness and much more. Hmmm ... where is Jesus?

During the week, the church opens the door and answers the phone to people who are truly in need. And you think “if this phone rings one more time, I swear ...” and you begin to hate them for needing more than you have to give. They need rent money, a place to sleep, new glasses, medication, food, a job, gas to drive their car to be able to look for work. Some just need to hear you say, “It’ll be okay.” You shake your fist and ask “where are you, Jesus?” and the phone rings again and the person on the other end says, “I got a \$200 bonus at work today. Do you know of anyone who needs groceries?” “Yeah, I got some furniture I need to get rid of ... do you know of anyone who needs a bed, a couch, a kitchen table?” Hmmm ... where is Jesus?

I got a call today from someone who is very concerned about her health. And the news isn’t good. And I wondered – I wondered – is she going to ask me, “Where is Jesus?” I listened for it and she never asked. Instead, she said, “Please pray for me. Please have the church pray for me.” Of course, I said, of course we will ... and we have. Her response, “I know ... I feel it. It’s the body of Christ at work and that’s all I need.”

Hmmm ... where is Jesus?

Jesus isn’t here right now. Jesus is no longer in the world, but we are. The body of Jesus is no longer here, but the body of Christ is. We are here. (point to the screen) And this is US. And these are just 10 things out of a

million that belong to us. Jesus keeps sending us out into a world of need, over and over again with words of love on our lips and service in our hands and our feet to help carry the load of grief, to hold a shaking hand, to offer a cup of cold water. Our words and our actions seem so small and often it feels as if they do not satisfy the need, but they are the tasks we have been given to do and we have promised to try.

I think in order to take seriously the needs of the world we need to remember that we do it together. The church is not the work of one lonely Messiah but it is the work of God, carried out by all who believe. And there is no end in sight to God's work. In the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist asked if Jesus was the one ...the one we have been waiting for. Jesus told John, "Yes, I'm the one. I'm it. It's me, but it doesn't end with me."

And it can't just end there. This is happening to us right now. (point to the screen) And you might be the only Jesus a person ever sees.