

Occupy!

Isaiah 35:1-7

Matthew 22:15-22

It's a phenomenon.

It's a movement.

It's an expression.

It's huge.

It's global.

It's Occupy.

And it has spread like wildfire--even in this past week, this movement has burgeoned off the charts, creating protests and marches and sit-ins in places like Jackson, Mississippi, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Rome, Italy, and even Australia.

They are crying out and beating drums, they are sharing food and sleeping in tents, they are young and old, unemployed and working, they are students and labor unions and war veterans--in other words, they are people from every walk of life. They call themselves the 99% per centers, and they are dogged and determined in their protest against social and economic inequality, corporate greed, and the influence of corporate money and lobbyists on government, and much more. There is no single organizer, or even political message...but it is clear, what started as a small thing on Wall Street on September 17 has struck a chord in our collective consciousness.

And if you want to know more about the actual experience, I invite you to join Ellen and Brendan, two young people deeply involved in the movement, in the forum after worship. Both of them have spent a lot of time there, and I can't wait to hear more--here is a tidbit---the movement is so diverse and willing to bind together in spite of differences, that even the anarchists, well, agreed not to anarchize !?!

What has piqued my interest besides the actual movement is the fact that at first--mostly, this movement consisted of a majority of beautiful people of the generation that Ellen and Brendan are a part of: Generation Y, Echo Boomers, the Millennial's--the 20-30 something cadre of adult Americans.

And let me tell you--these 20-30 some-things, in spite of not being assured of jobs--let alone meaningful work after college, in spite of huge student loan debt, in spite of the world they have inherited, are powerful. Look at what they started! So inspirational, that our own Ginny Robinson, started an Occupy Newton movement in order to support the courage of the protestors downtown. Listen to the ad that was in the Tab this week.

(read ad)

The idea of Occupy has taken fire. In fact, it's taken off in offices and blogs and beyond. For example, on the RevGalBlogPal blog, Monday was declared "Occupy RevGals! What do you want to say?," which invited readers to post what they would like to stand up for.

We are sitting here, in Occupy Sanctuary, Occupy Church--
What is it that you are praying for, hoping for, listening for?

Occupy.

It's an interesting concept, no?

The definition of Occupy is:

1. to live or be established in (a house, flat, office, etc.)
2. to keep busy or engrossed; engage the attention of
3. to take up (a certain amount of time or space)
4. to take and hold possession of, esp as a demonstration "students occupied the college buildings or a country is occupied by force."
5. to fill or hold (as in an office.)

Engage. Engross. To take up space. To hold.

As in, I hope that the Spirit of God is holding us this morning, filling this worship space, engaging our imagination and senses.

Occupy.

Ancient Israel suffered not only occupation but diaspora. Israel was occupied by the Babylonians, and the Babylonians decided to relocate the most powerful, the most talented Israelites from Jerusalem to Babylon, to diffuse and dilute the voice of the Israelites. It worked. Many of them assimilated into the culture, forming the first practices of Judaism that are the root of many modern rituals and practices in today's Jewish congregations.

So, in spite of being displaced, the homes and hearts of the Israelite people were occupied by domination, and they were crying out for freedom. (At least, some of them felt that way, but that's another story.)

Enter in the Persian conqueror Cyrus.

He was pretty successful in overthrowing the Babylonians, actually pretty much the entire area of what we know today as the Middle East. That means he also had Jerusalem, under his realm.

What is astonishing is that in our text today,

The God of Israel appoints him the savior, the anointed one, the messiah, of Israel.

This, for all intents and purposes, was really quite outrageous.

He not only was a foreigner and a conqueror, he was also NOT one of the Chosen People.

In fact, Cyrus wasn't even aware of the God of Israel, and yet, the Lord of

Hosts calls Cyrus as God's own:

For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. (Isaiah 35)

Don't you just love it? God choosing the most unlikely of saviors for God's chosen people. Just when you think you have this God thing figured out, more mystery emerges--at least that is what I imagine was the response of the ancients.

For me, too. I am daily surprised by the Mystery of God. She shows up in the unlikeliest places, teaching me grace and humility through those people and places that are perceived as unholy, mundane, and dismissible.

Seriously,

I see a lot of the Holy Spirit's movement in the Occupy Wall Street movement.

These protestors have started a national--even global conversation about our country's priorities and values--about jobs, budgets, wars, greed. We will see, if we haven't already, images and hear things from the demonstrators which will offend us, and some will inspire us. We will hear demands we agree with and some that we don't.

But mostly, this movement is about what we care about as Christians--caring for the poor, the homeless, those in need, and those in crisis.

They are calling for Justice. For hope. For blessing.

They are finding unity in diversity.

They are leading towards a bit of heaven on earth, for all.

Maybe this movement is like Cyrus--

It's being called forth by the Divine,
even if it isn't a "religious" movement.

Have you ever heard the saying, "Sometimes the best Christians are those who aren't?"

Listen to these words from Brendan Curran's sermon last week, where he describes his impressions of Dewey Square:

I watched somewhat astonished as the rather spontaneously formed crowd developed a process of communication where everyone's voice and values were heard. There didn't seem to be a rush in making demands but rather an emphasis on not emulating the behavior of the structures they protest. The crowds of hundreds together agreed on a statement of radical inclusivity to all different peoples and unanimously voted to share food with the areas homeless people. They even set up an area for free clothes distribution. Soldiers coming back from Iraq started a medical tent, others formed a food tent, a media tent, an arts and culture committee, and the Christians, the Buddhists, the Jewish people, the Muslims, The Pagans, the Hindus, the Zoroastrians, and everyone else formed space to create an open meditation and prayer space.

I was amazed to see a constant flow of food, medicines, and clothes pour in from farmers markets, and surrounding businesses to feed the group of afflicted and/or concerned individuals who had gathered there. One of the many conversations I eavesdropped on was between two young white men and two young black women talking together appreciating how only a generation ago one groups' parents was throwing rocks at the others' school bus but now they find themselves together talking about their shared concerns...they held signs that said, "We are the 99%," and, "Blessed are the poor!"

I think the people occupying Dewey Square might be trying to empower us to name false idols and to embody compassion in our neighborhood. They have reminded me that we must not be embarrassed by Love. We can let our lights shine before one another and that when we do this together we see more and more clearly the face of the living God who goes before us who came that we might have life and have it abundantly. Sounds a little like the realm of God, doesn't it? To me, it does.

But there is more. There are those of us who are not called to protest, who cannot make signs and march. For some, it's just not our thing. How is God calling us? How is God calling you to bring forth justice and Light?

I think the concept of "occupy" might help us discern.

What does it mean to dwell, to live, to engage, for you?

Sometimes, I think, we tend to either overstuff our lives with so much that we don't really occupy our lives. We live for the next moment, the next meeting, the next thing, so much that we forget where we are and whose we are, and why we are doing what we are doing. We forget that we have a voice, that we too, are anointed by God.

My favorite image of the Occupy movement is a snapshot of a woman in the vast wilderness of Alaska, posing with her three dogs. Her sign said, "Find your Space. Occupy It. "

Sisters and brothers,
I challenge you today--
To not be embarrassed by Love.
To let your Lights shine.
To find your space--
and Occupy it.

Amen.