

## Creating America: A Communion Meditation

II Corinthians 8:7-15

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I love my native land. But I have been fortunate enough to have traveled in other parts of the world, to places where totalitarianism wants to control thought and too often succeeds in suppressing expression of opinion, needs and desires. I love the grand experiment in democracy that our forebears commenced on these shores 230 years ago. Creative geniuses built our nation, recognizing the need for a commonwealth while protecting the individual rights of each citizen. They sought to create a balance of powers among the executive, judicial and legislative branches so that no one element would hold more power than the others and certainly that no one individual would have enough power to claim kingship.

The framers assumed a constant monitoring of government, especially through the electorate and the people they send to Congress, given the delicate balance of power. Industrialization, development of global markets and world wars shifted the emphasis on community well-being to profit and power. Political service became a profession and special interest overshadow common interests. As America's wealth and power have increased beyond any imaginings of the framers, two vital connections have become severely strained – the power of the vote and the care of those who do not have enough personal economic power to have their voices heard.

It took a storm of gigantic proportions, Katrina, to expose the level of entrenched poverty in America's urban centers and to move the conscience of a nation to act. Ten months later, that conscience is still being formed and much remains to be done. We are at worship today, honoring the birth of our nation, acting out the first of all freedoms, the right to worship and share communion as our hearts lead us. Patriotic zeal and religious commitment meet here as two forces to shape conscience and, with God's help, to redress the balance of America once again.

In our Call to Worship today we read of Paul's admonition to the Church at Corinth that they give to the very needy church at Jerusalem "in order that there may be a fair balance between their need and your abundance."

I visited Washington this week. I returned filled with the conviction of Paul. We lack a fair balance between the wealth of this great nation and the needs of its poorest citizens and the poorest people in the world. Clearly, neither political party has created a very high bar for establishing such a balance. An emerging movement aims, in the words of Jim Wallis of Sojourners, "[to go] neither to the left nor the right, but ... deeper, not to some muddled political middle but to a moral center." The fear that underlies so many of our governmental policies, gobbling up our limited resources, has a voracious appetite. It leaves little for those who need help from the rest of us. Gleaning in this field is hungry work.

Washington is a maddening place these days. A fellow pastor from Rochester and I had the opportunity to visit with Congresswoman Louise Slaughter while in Washington. She saw us immediately after leaving the floor of the House of Representatives where a vote on yet another attempt to raise the Minimum Wage failed. We told her about our concerns for the poor; she shared her frustrations with the partisan divisions in Congress. She was, in short, mad! "They wouldn't even give us 50 cents!" she said, "And they want more time to debate that flag amendment. And, they've just voted another subsidy for the oil companies, of all people, to study methods of conservation! Where are our priorities?"

In her own way, Louise was crying out for a fair balance in a Congress that has raised its own pay by \$31,000 since 1997, the last year the Minimum Wage increased.

People of faith need to alter priorities, too. Abortion and gay rights dominate the public dialogue on moral issues in the public square. Quality of life issues like the Minimum Wage and child poverty get scant notice. Things have to change. People are suffering, and contrary to the popular stereotypes, the poor are not just the addicted and the Welfare mother who won't quit having babies, but those who work full time, some with multiple

jobs, but can't make enough to support a family. Where is the fair balance? Why isn't poverty the number one moral issue in this country ten months after Katrina?

We need to claim the best of America, this grand and glorious place that is still a beacon of freedom in the family of nations. At our best, Americans elevate common interests over special interests, seeking justice beyond charity. I have committed my energy and time and passion to this movement to break up the logjam of ideology in Congress.

At the Communion Table we visit the balance of God's abundant love for us and the measure of our love for God. Jesus emptied himself on our behalf and then called us to live an abundant life with this simple command – "love thy neighbor." As we come to this table, may we reflect upon the fair and biblical balance between that which claims the faith in our hearts and that which directs our allegiance to country. In the balance of America we still have power, the power of our voices. May God lead us to responsible lives in both faith and citizenship. Amen.