

Freedom

We often hear about freedom – sometimes freedom from oppression, but often just freedom. But freedom has a dark side, and that is the freedom to do evil – by commission or omission. Jesus recognized this conundrum and told the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate it. What He was saying is that in community – we are, after all, social animals – our freedom comes with responsibility.

In our day and age, this responsibility for the compassion that Jesus and other historical religious leaders have taught includes compassion for the earth and the community of all its live inhabitants. There is this thing called the rights/responsibility equation. The more rights one has, the greater one's responsibility to the earth and its community of life.

Those of us who have power --over the land we “own” or the people we “manage”--have a special responsibility to treat it/them with the same reverence we would want to be treated. We all have a responsibility non-violently to oppose and end the violence of war and economic disparities. The more power one has, the greater the responsibility.

We all are usually very good at treating our close friends and family with compassion and respect. At the same time, it is easy to fear rather than learn about, and become friends with, those who are different. In this sense, the Achilles Heel of the Far Right is defining community as only one's close friends and family – not the whole of humanity and the earth. Fear and hate have no place in a consistently humane and compassionate world.

In the present context of riders on the congressional Government funding bill, which appropriate sacred native lands for mining, and give back the right of the big banks to play in the credit default swap market, are evils of commission. In the context of the recently-released Terror Report, this means that those who authorized torture must be held accountable in the courts for their actions. For all of us to not insist on this is an act of evil by omission.

These are inconvenient truths that follow from the Charter for Compassion which says, in part, "any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate." The Charter and the opportunity for comments or possible essay submissions for our Compassion Series are available at

www.spiritualityresourcecenter.com.

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