



## *Round Hill Community Church*

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**Sermon: May 30, 2010**

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**Wisdon Calls, Shannon A. White**

Proverbs 8: 1-4; 22-31

John 16: 12-15

Last week I was walking in New York City near Radio City Music Hall. My attention was drawn to a line numbering hundreds of people ...people of all races, ages, nationalities standing peacefully... one in front of the other in a line which extended several city blocks...waiting to get into the concert hall. The funny thing was, it was only 9 in the morning. I wondered who would be playing at that hour? I craned my neck around the marquis trying to understand why all of these people were there. Finally, I decided to stop and ask someone in line. "The Dalai Lama is speaking today," a kind man answered softly. Oh, I thought... Then the marquis came into view... Healing the Divide" How to attain "Buddahood in order to benefit all other...beings."

What is it that draws hundreds of people to come and listen to the Dalai Lama for 4 full days of teaching? Interesting. I wonder if that many people would take even two days to come and hear Jesus teach if he were living today. Hmm...

After listening to these statistics, you may be surprised. According to a USA TODAY/Gallup poll of 1000 adults taken this year in early May, 92% of Americans say there is a God and 83% say this God answers prayers. However, an earlier study (several years ago) out of CUNY says while people may believe in God, more and more people don't identify with any particular house of worship. (CUNY 2002)

The Church certainly has its work cut out for it if it is to remain viable in the 21st century. Just this week, on the cover of the New York Times, a feature article talked about the declining membership in churches...and highlighted an Episcopal church in Harlem which is struggling to stay alive. We know this is not a new phenomenon...mainline Protestant churches have been one the decline for a while.

Things aren't much better in the Roman Catholic Church either. Disillusionment with church hierarchy caught up in decades of the clergy sex abuse seems to have driven hoards of Catholics away from the church. Last week, a pre-eminent Australian Archbishop (quoted in an article by the Associated Press) blamed the culture inside the church as the culprit. And that culture has turned a blind eye to priests accused of molesting children. The church has no one to blame but itself. Archbishop Coleridge said, "The Roman Catholic Church's culture of discretion and focus on "sin and forgiveness rather than crime and punishment" were among ingrained factors that ultimately led to the child sex abuse scandal and cover-up surrounding the church today." Other factors Coleridge included in his scathing review were a determination to protect the church's reputation, and an "institutionalized immaturity" of priests fostered by seminary training.

Sadly, the Church across denominational lines has been blind to the changing needs and stressors of people today too. Our contentment to live with the status quo has left the church at times as a mere reflection of a society which tends to be out of touch rather than an institution which offers a beacon of hope that there is another way to live. Why would people choose to spend time in church if they don't see hope lived out in the lives of those who espouse belief in a God who offers new life, freedom from the bondage of sin and evidence

of joy?

One of the problems attributing to this decline...I believe...is that we are experiencing a crisis in leadership today both inside and outside the church. I think people are aimlessly wandering or running so fast with the responsibilities of work and family and activities that we've lost our center. It is evidenced in countless stories about cover-ups for major blunders, lying or downplaying investments gone bad, cheating on spouses or dealing with the fallout of major human errors such as is the case of the oil spill in our Gulf of Mexico. People are losing it left and right. Leaders are not being trusted...And many people, unfortunately are not finding the church as a place of refuge.

My friends, Wisdom calls to us...ALL of us both inside the institution of the church and outside of its walls...all of those who believe in the Holy. Wisdom calls us to be authentic leaders of ourselves and of others... authentic leaders in this time and in this place.

What do I mean by authentic leadership? Two weeks ago, I went out to California to attend a conference with the Hoffman Institute, an organization with which I have been involved over the last two years which helps people live authentically in the world. This conference dealt with the topic of being an authentic leader and pulled on research from Harvard researchers and the somatic practices out of the Strozzi Institute of Embodied Leadership in California.

I was there with 2 dozen extremely bright business leaders from around the country who were all seeking the answer to the same question: "How can we be authentic leaders in our world today?" The answer I found was to dig deep within, to lead from an open heart and out of the center of my being. Now what does THAT mean and what does it have to do with this sermon?

It has everything to do with Wisdom...

Authenticity in relationships, as I have heard it described requires, first of all a commitment to look inward...to see and to know oneself. It begins with a person knowing what her guiding values are. Let's personalize it. What value is most central in your life? Are you driven by love, by faith, by family, by money, by integrity, by success or by generosity, to name a few values, for example? One leader explains it this way: "Think of your life as a house. Can you knock down the walls between the rooms and be the same person in each of them?"

Another factor the different seminar leaders talked about is self awareness...what is your life story and how has your history affected you both negatively and positively? What baggage do you bring to bear on your current relationships?

Interestingly, when I read titles of upcoming seminars in various workplaces, some of them spend a great deal of time helping people deal with how to manage themselves...their own emotions so they don't spill over onto others. The problem is people who are not aware of what's inside of them, are ticking time bombs. They are like rudderless ships carried around and set off by the actions of others.

Wisdom calls....

Thirdly, the consensus seems to be that authentic leaders have other people around them to whom they are accountable. They trust those people to tell them the truth and not to let them be in denial about their actions and will say the unpopular thing.

I recently read an article about Richard Blumenthal's recent comments surrounding his having served in active military duty. Chris Shays, a long-time friend of Blumenthal's was quoted as saying something to the effect of ...he had heard him make some of those comments and wished he had said something to him very early on to nip it in the bud.

Lastly, authentic leaders are embodied leaders...they don't lead from their heads; they lead out of the center of their beings.

I ask your indulgence as I describe one of the exercises we did to embody this idea...We were first asked

to walk around the room focused on thinking what we needed to do. We all rather speedily walked with purpose.

Then we were told to stand and envision our length, our width and our depth...literally. Our length represents the dignity of self and others; Our width represents our connection with self and others. It's our social connections, and our projects in the world; Our depth represents everything behind us: our training, our history, our experiences, what we've taken on in this lifetime and how all that connects with what can be.

As we stood, experiencing our length, our width, and our depth, we were told to locate our centers, and they directed us to focus about two inches below the belly button. Coming from that place we were told to walk around the room. It was an extraordinary experience. People were grounded, and connected...all without saying a word. They walked thoughtfully and purposefully. Wisdom calls...How can we live from that authentic place, listening to the call of Wisdom? How can we offer sanctuary not only to those of us who are already here within our walls, but to those who are hurting outside and need to hear a word of hope?

William Cowper was an English poet and hymn-writer. He had studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1754. Strangely enough, he never practiced. Shy and gentle by nature, he was not emotionally equipped to deal with the stress and strain associated with the profession. He suffered intense fits of melancholy and spiritual despair. It is told that one evening he summoned a London cabby and directed him to drive to the Thames River. A heavy fog blanketed the city and for more than an hour, the cab driver cautiously drove along the obscured streets in search of the river. Little did the driver know that his noticeably impatient passenger had resolved to relieve his troubled mind by plunging into a watery grave. Cowper had weighed everything in the balances of life no longer seemed worth the bother. Angered by the delay and anxious to get on with his plan, Cowper lunged from the cab and set out to find the river on his own.

He wandered and groped for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, he discovered himself standing at his own doorstep! Coincidence? Not in Cowper's judgment. He went directly to his room, took up pen and paper and wrote the words to the hymn: "God Moves in A Mysterious Way His Wonders to Perform." (Larry Powell, Blow the Silver Trumpets, CSS Publishing) It goes like this:

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm;  
Ye fearful saints fresh courage take; The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break with blessings on your head.  
Judge not the Lord be feeble sense, But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.  
Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.

The writer of Proverbs paints a beautiful panoramic view of wisdom as being the secret of effective living. Wisdom is depicted as being the first thing God created and an essential characteristic for every man or woman if they are going to experience any joy in living. "Happy is the one who listens to me (wisdom) watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever who finds me finds life and obtains favors from the Lord." (Proverbs 8:34-35)

This tantalizing glimpse at wisdom is clearly portrayed as an appeal for men and women to discover her secrets. Wisdom offers a high reward to those who follow her way. But it is our choice as to whether or not we will follow.

A group of Harvard researchers who have studied authentic leadership said this, "We all have the capacity to inspire others. But we must first be willing to devote ourselves to our personal growth and development as leaders." That is why people stood in line to see the Dalai Lama. And that's why people WOULD go to see Jesus. Authentic leaders...

Dear members of Round Hill Community Church: You will have the opportunity shortly to go inside and do some reflective work during this interim period. I urge you to utilize this period to listen to the voice of wisdom and discern those things that the Spirit of Truth has to say to you so that you may be authentic leaders

of others and of yourselves.

Wisdom calls....