

AN ENCOURAGING WORD FOR TROUBLING TIMES #132 (by Rev. Dr. Alice Wolfe, 10/30/20)

“Rights or Obligations?”

While preparing for our online Bible study, “How Should Christians Respond to Racism?”, I ran across a quote by Stan Rushworth, Professor of Native American Studies and an elder of Cherokee descent. He said, there is a “difference between a Western settler mindset of ‘I have rights’ and an indigenous mindset of ‘I have obligations.’ Instead of thinking that I am born with rights, I choose to think that I am born with obligations to serve past, present, and future generations, and the planet herself.”

Professor Rushworth speaks much wisdom to our nation, past, present, and future. So many in our nation focus on rights—to do this, that, or other. Yes, we all have rights as human beings, and we should all be treated fairly and justly. When I focus on my rights, I focus on myself. However, when I realize I have obligations to others, I focus on others, not myself. Professor Rushworth’s quote reminds me of what Jesus said,

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45, NRSV)

Jesus did not focus on his rights as the Son of God; he did not come to be served. Rather, he focused on his loving desire and obligation—to come as a humble servant who willingly endured rejection, abuse, persecution, humiliation, and ultimately, an excruciatingly painful death on the cross, giving his life so that every person (past, present, and future) may be forgiven of their sins and restored in relationship with God. How different our world would be if we all focused on the same... Maybe we all need to be born again (through Christ) so that we, too, learn a sense of obligation to one another, to creation, and especially to Christ who gave his life for us. For you see, when we focus on our obligations, we don’t rape the land of its resources, and we don’t persecute or destroy others because they look different from us. If we, like Christ, live not to be served but to serve, it changes our perspective on everything...

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank you for not only giving your life for us and for all, but also for setting an example for us of how to live... Forgive me for all the times I have lived for myself and focused on my rights... Forgive me for all the times I have hurt others or the creation you made for us to care for... Help me turn away from my selfishness and sins, and turn to you! I need you! I surrender my life to you, and I want you to be my Lord! Help me to follow your example and live a life of servanthood. Help me to not focus on myself but on my heart’s desire and obligation to serve others and point them to you! To you be all the glory, now and forever! Amen.