

CHANGING OUR INVOLVEMENT IN ONGOING WARS

Some people ask me how I became a pastor and later a Department of Veterans affairs chaplain. If they know that I was a scientist before becoming a pastor and a chaplain they are really intrigued. I begin by saying “First, it’s a long story and you may not have time to listen to it today. Second, the short answer is, “I’ve had a 21-year argument with God.”

Really? Have I truly been struggling with God like Job struggled with his 3 friends and with God after he lost everything? Yes, I did struggle with God like Job for a long time. However, I also persisted like Jacob whom God renamed Israel after the all-night struggle with the man. By the end of that night, Jacob’s hip was dislocated. However, he also emerged from the struggle with a new name “Israel.” It means something like, “He struggles with God.” That was quite a change from being someone better known for his struggles with family.

One of the problems that I struggle with is the rapid and sometimes destructive changes that are happening even now with many of our social, moral, ethical, religious and spiritual values. I am caught up in in my own need to ask questions not only to find answers to my questions but also ways to encourage each of us to slow down the changes within and around us. We need to ask, “Is this actually good for me and the others who are exposed to yet another change?”



I want to explore, in a series of blogs, some of the troubling aspects of change as well as the implications of the changes in our values, beliefs and lifestyles. I do realize that some of us thrive on change. However, as anyone who lived through the 1960s can attest, not everyone agrees to march together. Large numbers of people, then in their late teens and early twenties, disagreed with the war that seemed to go on forever in Vietnam. When Americans began being killed or injured in large numbers, many younger people protested and called for an immediate end to the war.

Gradually, the veterans of the Vietnam War began to “come home.” However, many of these men and women had to disguise their identify as veterans when they first got off the planes that brought them home. They were not welcomed back as they had a right to expect. Even some churches, locally and nationally, had difficulty in answering some of the most basic questions like these: 1. Where was God in Vietnam? 2. Why did God allow me to kill people over there? 3. Why should I have any hope? (i.e. God can’t forgive me for my sins)

I was not there. I tried three times to join the military in various ways. I was not allowed to join. However, after working with veterans as a chaplain for over 12 years, I have some observations about war. 1) We seem all-too-willing to go to war. 2) We seem willing to support unending wars. 3) Many of us have tuned the suffering produced by war out of our perceptions. 4) Others of us benefit from war by working for the American companies that produce the weapons of war.

Now we are beginning to question the costs of war including the spiritual costs. The way that some of the combat vets express the spiritual dimension of war is to say, as many have to me, "Chaplain, war is hell!"

Jesus reminded us that we would experience "wars and rumors of wars" before his return. (Matthew 24:6 & Mark 13:7) Perhaps we have gotten so used to wars and rumors of war that we are hoping subconsciously for God to return to end all wars. Maybe we need do some work on being less interested in war and other forms of violence so that we can focus on God with us ("Emmanuel") -- Jesus.

We need individually to ask, "Why?" "Why war—even nuclear war?" It does little good to distract one another from the sufferings caused by war by blaming all wars on religious differences. Why do we assume that God does not love every person we label as our "enemy?" Are we to believe that destroying other people and their families and homes somehow pleases God? That doesn't begin to be consistent with the teachings of Jesus and his followers.

As ever I am open to your responses to what I write. I plan to write about several of the moral, ethical and social value changes as well as the spirituality that some are so eager to embrace. I realize that some of us question the value of many changes.

May God's peace be with each and all of us as we seek to walk this journey of life together in God's presence.

- Rev. Larry LaPierre