

MM e-mail Blue Sheet

Moment Ministries — Corvallis Oregon — Our 33rd Year

Morgan's Moment...

My eyes stopped at a word...
"undescribable"...
a word I'd never seen.

Even my spell-check rebelled.
a conference for religious leaders
of "Progressive Christianity."

I checked their list of prospects
Progressive and Emergent
Denominational and
Non-denominational
Faith Communities
Large and Small
Describable and Undescribable.

I was almost hooked...
at last a place for Moment Ministries
they take the "undescribable."

I've always had trouble defining
what I'm about...
even after these 33 years.

Those that accept the undescribable
sound like the kind of crowd
Jesus might even enjoy.

I'll bet a lot of my friends
would put themselves in the
undescribable camp.

— Art Morgan

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PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

I was recently referred to a new to me web page under the name www.ProgressiveChristianity.org. It led me to another similar group with the name Arizona Foundation for Contemporary Theology. Others have sought a name for folk who don't think they fit the "main line" categories any more. Nobody wants to think themselves not progressive or contemporary. Maybe Dick Wing's "open theology" would work better. Anyway, I've been in email conversation with Fred Plumer, head of ProgressiveChristianity, and we have talked about a meeting in Gig Harbor at Tides Tavern. His suggestion. How progressive can you get? These two groups appeal politely for affiliation by individuals and organizations. Moment Ministries doesn't do affiliation. We don't have members, budgets, property, paid people, committees...all making it difficult to find anything to affiliate with. We are incorporated as a non-profit organization, but that's about it. These groups want a commitment and ask for money.

I can't really sign my group on as an affiliate. What is my group? The few that come on Thursday nights, or the larger group that comes on Christmas Eve or the several hundred who sometimes read (they claim) this blue sheet? Some call on me for pastoral services, some tell me that MM is their only church, but I don't see that as anything I can put under these umbrellas.

Actually, I've been doing "progressive Christianity" and "contemporary theology" through Moment Ministries for over 33 years. I've refused to get into the structuring game. I bless those with a spirit for it, I guess, but wonder if they are not headed down the institutionalism path I vow to avoid.

I'm still intrigued, and interested in this movement, and hope that it can teach us that the Christian religion at its best walks a path of service with those who lack wealth and power and stands against the forces of empire that march through history using wealth and power. If they walk that way, maybe I can walk with them with or without affiliation.

READING

It is my practice to write a one page summary of each book I read. I need this because I'm terrible at remembering authors and titles, but pretty good at remembering content if I see a title. What really gets me is when I get behind and books overlap. That happened with "Stones into Schools" by Greg Mortenson. Although I tabbed a lot of pages it took time to go back and capture the essence of the book. It is a book that I was happy to re-visit. Some of it worked its way into this week's back page.

EGYPT AND THREE CUPS OF TEA

Of course Greg Mortenson's "Three Cups of Tea" doesn't mention Egypt. His "Stones into Schools" doesn't either. Why should I?

Only because the current uprising in Egypt took over space in my mind that was working on thoughts launched by Mortenson. What thoughts?

Most are at least aware of Greg Mortenson and his remarkable accomplishment of building schools in most remote parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Just getting to those places would make for exciting reading. But getting there in the midst of a war effort against terrorist groups by American and allied forces is something else.

So, what about Egypt? Let's hope no one is motivated to send our troops in there, although I'm sure that kind of fix-it-up mentality is still alive. It is not unheard of for my favorite country that I love to prop up a "friendly dictator" in the name of our national interests. President Mubarak has maintained power aided by billions of American dollars. Allies of any kind are not easy to come by, nor are they cheap.

Whether the people are fed, employed, enjoy freedom and human rights are not to be seriously questioned. We come and go, exchange students, visit pyramids, ride camels, wonder at the Nile, and love how Moses escaped the Pharaoh. Then of all things, the people dare to rise up against the ruler with the heavy hand. All our national benefits are in jeopardy.

I'm imagining our joint chiefs of staff, our pentagon officials, our CIA and everyone else in Washington DC having strategic meetings about the issue. There must be a lot going on. Where is American going to be in this situation?

Then I remember Greg Mortenson, how people like Bill Clinton, John Kerry, Colin Powell, General David Petraeus, head of the US Central Command, and Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Command, have all read "Three Cups of Tea." I remember that Mortenson was invited to speak to CIA officials and the Pentagon folks and among other things said:

"As best as I can tell, we've launched 114 cruise missiles into Afghanistan so far... the cost of one is about \$840,000. For that much money you could build dozens of schools that could provide tens of thousands of students with a balanced, non-extremist education over the course of a generation. Which do you think will make us more secure?"
(*"Stones into Schools,"* p. 251)

In turn, Admiral Mike Mullen said to the House Armed Services Committee:

"We can't kill our way to victory."

Mortenson took his "Three Cups of Tea" into military academies in Colorado, West Point, Annapolis and Camp Pendleton. His thoughts have spread through officers and troops deployed to the Mid-east. The commander of one U.S. task force in a remote region of Afghanistan wrote Mortenson after reading "Three Cups of Tea,"

"I am convinced that the long-term solution to terrorism in general and Afghanistan specifically is education. The conflict here will not be won with bombs but with books..."
(Lt Colonel Chris Kolenda, US Army, p. 258)

My thought is simple and probably simplistic about foreign policy in Egypt. But I am slightly comforted by the idea that some people in our government administration have read "Three Cups of Tea." Let us pray.

Art Morgan, February 3, 2011