

## **From the Heart About the Heart of the Matter**

### **The Deposit We Leave In Each Other's Lives by Lois Wilson**

The heart of the matter is to “know God and enjoy Her/Him forever”. That suggests to me that human and non-human *community* is the heart of the matter — my longing for a symbiotic relationship with the vast universe, the earth and all its creatures, as well as my longing for authentic human community. Such a human community must affirm me in my particularity, gender, age and sexuality, but bring me into life-giving and life-sustaining relationships with persons very different from myself.

When I was three months old my mother tucked me in a “Tiginaugan,”(complete with moss diapers) and we went canoeing. I have come to love the water, the wind, the trees, the rocks, the flowers, the animals and the stars, and to look upon the silences, the solitude, as well as the spaciousness of Lake Superior, as essential to my spirituality. As one who loves the big city, with all its diversity of peoples, ideas, culture, food, movies, stage plays, faith communities and neighborhoods, I also find it necessary to spend some of the summer in a canoe on a lake, to allow the beauty and peace as well as the ferocious strength of the natural world to encourage reflection, perspective, and healing in my life. In return, nature, which is currently screaming in pain, has taught me to pay attention to its needs for nurture, protection and nourishment.

My immediate family, as well as my extended family, lie at the heart of the matter. After each of four births, I stayed awake all night, awed with the mystery of birth and my connection to it. It is in that crucible of human experience, the family, that I have connected with every human emotion — love, hate, envy, pride, sorrow, joy, jealousy, forgiveness. It is no accident that Matthew tells us that we are not free to offer praise to God until we are reconciled to our “brother”. And I have always felt piqued by

Isaiah's magnificent Chapter 58 describing "an acceptable fast", that requires one to "never evade a duty to your kinsfolk".

My faith community was defined by the perspectives of the Student Christian Movement, which set my faith in an international context, and in a biblically rooted understanding of justice — that also affirms the feminist lens through which I view the human family. I rejoice that daring queries and robust exchanges as well as expressed doubts and profound commitments about the Christian faith continue to be the norm of that community. I owe a continuing debt to The United Church of Canada for its strong ecumenical posture, its environmental awareness, its faithful advocacy of social and economic justice, its stunning contextual understanding of mission that allows its reciprocal partnership in community with sister churches all around the world. But the heart of the matter is that its members need to reflect, act, and speak more courageously of Jesus and his lively tradition of protest and transformation of peoples and cultures. It urgently needs to re-invent itself as an inter-cultural church, so that it might reflect Christ's presence and the Canadian reality more faithfully.

I continue to be stirred to the depth of my being by belonging to a global ecumenical community, concerning itself with the plight of the voiceless and the victims. It has to do with "turning the world upside down." The heart of the matter is demonstrated by Michael Lapsey, an Anglican priest who lost both arms and an eye to a parcel bomb during the apartheid regime, but who now offers hope to sworn enemies through his Institute for Reconciliation.

I was nurtured in the United Church, and for some time thought everyone else should be too! I used to make icy snowballs and aim them at the whites of the eyes of the Catholic kids in my neighborhood. I never knew a Muslim or a Hindu or a Sikh by name until I was an adult. Now I know it is more important to know a Buddhist than to know about Buddhism. We in Canada have the enormous opportunity to forge a civic *community* that includes people of every stream of faith, as well as those without religion. Surely that is what it is to "know" God.

And finally there is the human family spanning the globe. I once found myself in a feather bed in Geneva, and I couldn't sleep all night. I had come directly from a hard bed in Calcutta and found it impossible to reconcile the immense poverty I had seen, and with which so many of the human family live daily, and the conspicuous affluence of a few, myself included. I have the same reaction when I visit an aboriginal reserve in Canada. I continue to wrestle with such issues as the economic disparity, climate change, male chauvinism, abandonment of human rights, mindless war, and countless other atrocities. This spurs me into listening to the voices of the victims. It also means reading the Bible more seriously. It means becoming politically astute. It is as important to me to know about the International Monetary Fund as it is to know the United Church Creed. Maybe more. After all, God so loved the *world*.

I count it important to accept my own God-given sexuality with joy, and to affirm the announced sexuality of others. My view is that sexuality is intimately tied up with holy spirituality, energy, confidence and feeling completely at home in the universe.

The heart of the matter (as my father taught me) is the deposit we leave in each other's lives. What counts is the ability to rejoice in the gift of life and live affirmatively. This means listening attentively to questions for which I have no answer, and taking the risk of exploring and responding to new directions. When I die, I hope to do so sounding a joyous note of thanksgiving for the One who gave me life. And resting confidently in God's mercy.