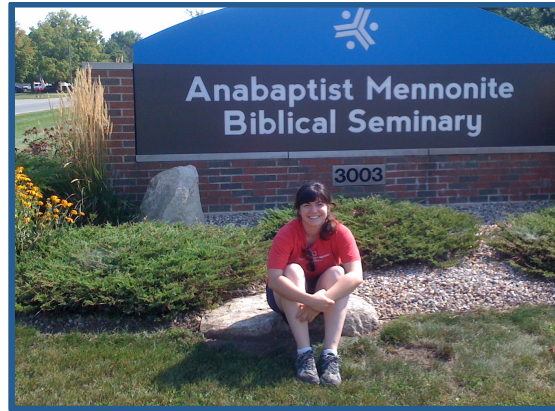


June 30, 2014

BCM Internship Reflection by Katerina Friesen



I studied at Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries in June, 2014 for 2 weeks as part of my M.Div. program at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. My study focus during this short internship was climate change theology and watershed discipleship, in preparation for a summer of writing and organizing around these issues at the First Mennonite Church of San Francisco.

I arrived at Casa Anna Schultz to find Elaine and Ched downing huge mugs of “cold care” tea and popping Echinacea tablets like they were candy. They had just caught a nasty virus down at the Manna and Mercy House (the “No Mercy House” when it came to this virus, we quipped). Needless to say, Ched and Elaine were not their usual energetic selves and took nearly two weeks to fully recover, just before beginning an intense five-week traveling circuit. Even though the timing of their illness unfortunately aligned with my internship, they hospitably incorporated me into their daily rhythms.

After just finishing my first year at seminary and re-discovering my love for new ideas and learning there, I felt eager to integrate study and reflection in holistic ways with Ched and Elaine. It’s hard to imagine moving right into two seminary professors’ home for two weeks, but that’s what it felt like! One morning, the Bible reading during breakfast went much longer than usual as Ched and I geeked out over Job 38-40, and talked excitedly about the wild animals in the book of Job and the ancient cosmology of the three-story universe. Over lunch, Elaine brought up issues she was struggling with from her doctoral research on intergenerational trauma among Russian Mennonites, a topic close to home since we share a similar family history. We had many a good conversation over the usual favorite – bean tacos with guacamole. In the afternoons, I often spent time outdoors reading Michael Northcott’s *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, jotting questions down to bring back to the meal table for discussion. When I was finishing an article on Watershed Discipleship, Ched took hours to read over my draft and to give me helpful advice about further developing my writing. It’s not often that theologians and scholars share their tables and time in such an openhearted way. In return, I kept the kettle hot for tea and kept my sick friends satisfied with homemade granola and peanut butter cookies!

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In addition to this integration of theological study and daily life, two other aspects of my internship stood out. First, the questions of “who” and “what” my writing and theological reflection might serve this summer and beyond became clearer. I joined Ched in Skype calls with a circle of West Coast Mennonites who are organizing to resist extractive industries that harm indigenous peoples and earth, and further fuel climate change. Through this group, I came to see how theological writing can animate us as church in the work of resistance to destructive forces, and can also help us articulate constructive alternatives. Ched’s work on Watershed Discipleship helped me to recognize how the destructive theologies of Christendom, especially the Doctrine of Discovery, have provided justification for large-scale extraction and the exploitation of land and people. There is much more work needed in this area to connect the dots between theology, colonial conquest, and the alternate vision of Watershed Discipleship. I hope to continue lending my pen, voice and body to the growing group of people moving us as church to engage the powers.

Finally, my time at BCM offered me the chance to practice leadership as the facilitator of a Bible study on climate change and the story of Rizpah in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 (see picture of study at right). 17 people joined for the study and after-party, including my good friends from the Abundant Table community. Leading the study was more of a challenge



than I thought it would be. While in seminary, unexpected insecurities sometimes arose for me in the classroom when I offered my thoughts during academic conversations. Our Bible study included two Biblical scholars, a visiting professor of philosophy from Biola College, an Episcopal priest, and several others academically trained in the Bible and theology. While on an individual level, I was glad for their presence, I realized how much my old insecurities speaking to those I consider “experts” blocked my ability to listen fully to the Spirit at work through the text and in the group. Through all this, however, She did her work and I did mine, and the study touched a chord in the group about the need for wild, prophetic lament as an act of love for the particular people and places we deeply care about, especially those impacted by climate-induced violence. I look forward to continue practicing Bible study and doing theology using ancient texts that can create inward change and outward movement for the places we love.

In gratitude for Ched and Elaine, their hospitality, and the work of BCM that has nurtured me in so many ways!

*-Katerina Friesen**

** Katerina worked with us at BCM as an administrative assistant from 2010-2011.*