

Speaking to Stones and Other Serious Acts of Faith

Last Thanksgiving Day, as Strand Helpers fed two hundred homeless men and women at Occidental Park, five people stood in the rain and shouted at the cobblestones. I am sure that sounds familiar. We've all seen the mentally ill standing on corners and in parks, shouting epithets and haranguing whoever passes.

Wes Browning

How was this different? These people were acting together. The event they were gathered for had been planned as a rally, a demonstration that "bread is not enough", that free Thanksgiving dinners aren't enough, that what the homeless need more than meals and shelter is eradication of the causes of homelessness.

The rally was conceived by artist Rahn Porter, who arrived in Seattle only weeks earlier. He approached local homeless activists with the idea of creating a rally around the unveiling, at a city park, of giant loaves of bread which he would fashion. The local media would be notified, flyers would be circulated, and the giant loaves of bread would attract a crowd of interested NON-homeless to hear the homeless activists speak.

Occidental Park was selected for its nearness to downtown and to homeless shelters, and because no permits would be needed as long as only a bullhorn was used.

Now let us examine how sane this "rally" idea was in the first place. Who, besides the speakers themselves, and the homeless who have little choice, would be out in Occidental Park at noon on Thanksgiving Day, with or without giant loaves of bread?

How were these giant loaves of bread going to be created and transported to Occidental Park in two weeks by an artist who had only just moved to Seattle?

How sensible and sane could these homeless activists have been to believe that these giant loaves of bread would be in place, the TV cameras would be rolling, and throngs would gather on a warm, sunny (huh?) Thanksgiving

Day in SEATTLE, listening to speeches they would really rather not hear because they would rather be enjoying Thanksgiving at home, basking in the glow of their own charity, having contributed to the holiday foodbanks?

Rahn Porter himself couldn't actually make it, so not only was the art not present, there was no bullhorn. No one at all showed up for the rally except the speakers and one of their friends. Speaking were Anitra Freeman, Madeline Lewis, and Norma Rennison, representing the Homeless Women's Network and WHEEL; Steve Martinez, a Real Change vendor representative; and myself.

Yes. Me.

We discussed among ourselves the ludicrousness of presenting our arguments about the long-range needs of the homeless to the people in the soup line, who live it and don't need to hear it. We agreed unanimously to go ahead with the rally, although no one was actually there to be rallied.

Perhaps the only concrete beneficial outcome of the "rally" came about incidentally. One of the homeless men in the soup line was a young man who came

over and asked us to pray for him. He had come from Hawaii to find work. Instead he was robbed and wound up on the streets. We formed a circle and prayed that he would find shelter and peace, and a way to return to his family in Hawaii. Then we found a guide to show him where Lutheran Compass Center is, and pressed him to apply there the next morning.

We didn't need the rally to help that man. The five of us do this sort of thing on a daily basis. If we hadn't met him there we might have met him somewhere else in our work.

So, was the rally crazy?

Absolutely not. No political movement is possible without the intangible will to make it happen. The rally served to strengthen our will, and gave us renewed hope and confidence. Nobody gave up and walked away.

As long as there are people willing to try to move cobblestones, there is hope that others will be moved.



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Our Seattle Heritage

Christianizing Seattle

Early Missionary Comes to do Good and Does Well Indeed

In the early years of the 19th century, the East Coast witnessed the Second Great Awakening - a religious movement inspiring a crusade of clergyman to migrate to the Northwest. Inspired by the journals of Lewis and Clark, as well as religious doctrines, they sought to promote humanitarian reform through conversions of the native inhabitants to Christianity and hoped to create a Protestant republic.

Initial efforts began with Reverend Dr. John Richmond, a Methodist Episcopal missionary, who, with his wife and four children, were the first full-blooded whites to settle the Puget Sound area. Richmond initiated the Nisqually mission near the fort of the Hudson Bay Trading Company in 1839. His attempts to Christianize the natives, however, proved futile.

Yet others soon followed. Along with converting the natives, they serviced settlements interspersed throughout the Puget Sound wilderness: performing marriages, burials, and occasionally Sabbath day services. Essentially, however, they sought to instill old, familiar notions of order in these new, rugged communities.

Town founders recruited ministers - sometimes aggressively. A town minister was a sign of prosperity and attracted more settlers. When Reverend John DeVore, for example, sailed to the Northwest in 1853, destined for Olympia, he was intercepted at Alki by Lafayette Balch, founder of neighboring Steilacoom, who persuaded DeVore to come to Steilacoom, offering a new church and sole jurisdiction of the town. DeVore accepted.

Meanwhile, that same year, Reverend David Blaine, also a Methodist Episcopal minister, with his wife, Catherine, sailed from New York for Steilacoom. Learning of DeVore's recent settlement there, they were encouraged to move

north to a small village known as Seattle where its 50 inhabitants were eager to get a minister. In fact, Seattle landlords, such as the Borens and Dennys, fought over whose claim he would construct his church. Catherine wrote to a friend, "Each is afraid that the other will have some preference shown him or will derive more than his share of the benefits from the locality of the church." Denny's claim was chosen for the site.

Receiving support from his mission office, as well as pay for his services as county auditor, Blaine became one of the wealthiest men in town. The Blaines soon adopted an attitude of the survival of the fittest and deterministic destiny; preaching progress and cheerfully observing the falling of trees and the yielding of the *debased Indians* surrendering their lands. They preached against inter-racial relationships. Catherine wrote, "You have no idea of the degradation men bring on themselves with the squaws. These squaws are lower and more degraded than you can imagine, but little better than hogs in human shape."

Ironically, they maintained the belief that they were accomplishing a great deal in civilizing the natives and preserving them from rapid deterioration. What they failed to observe, however, was that the natives were dying due to foreign diseases introduced by the white settlers; native adolescents were succumbing to alcohol abuse - a substance non-existent until the arrival of the settlers (in fact, 75% of native American boys in grades 10 to 12 suffer from alcohol abuse, today); and initiating the displacement of the native inhabitants.

—by Chris French



"Another good year to invest in hats."