

# Central Area Group

## Response to partner group report

### January 11, 2009

**Sunday, September 14, 2008**

#### **Group profile:**

- Open minded
- Focused
- Diverse male/female ages 20-60's, Mostly European Descent but also people of other cultures, nationalities
- People of faith
- Share Anabaptist beliefs/traditions
- Well educated (college degrees)
- Charitable
- Strong family oriented
- Work more out of our heads, intellectually focused-logical
- Environmentally aware
- Giving (self, time, etc...)
- Centrally located in St. Joseph county
- Urban, neighborhood
- Live with immediate family only
- American upper middle class
- Casual dress and behavior
- Modest, counter cultural to American society.
- Most grew-up in church, approximately 2/3 – 3/4 in a Mennonite Church
- Fairly young church.

We listened to the scripture (Luke 23:32-43) being read. Then we mentioned what we noticed in the text, or what we associated with it:

- Childhood memories of hearing the story as a part of the Easter story every year.
- Hearing the song "Jesus remember me, when you come into your Kingdom".
- Wanting Jesus to respond to those who were mocking him on the cross but he didn't.
- It's never too late to repent.
- Visual imagery of "The Passion" or other re-enactments of the story.
- Image of 3 crosses that comes from this one story.
- Important story as a part of your faith.
- Ultimate sacrifice as a servant leader.
- Contrast of the 2 criminals on the cross and how others can react differently to the same situation.

## September 21, 2008

Last week, the group leader asked us to bring in an object to represent ourselves to put in the center of the space in which we gather. Andrew brought a used book by a favorite author. He works in a used book store. Danile brought two hymnals. We like to sing and we like words. More to come...

We are going to try to be comfortable with some silence, to give this scripture serious thought.

We listened to the story read out loud 3 times. After the first reading, we said the word or phrase from the story that caught our attention:

Danile: Then he tried to say Jesus remember me

Sherry W: Forgive

Andrew: Evildoers

Gail: Evildoers

Lin: King

Murray: The people were still

Stacy: Let him save himself

Sherry: W and Sherry S: Father forgive them

After the second reading, we said the questions we had:

Stacy: How did the humble thief know Jesus was holy?

Gail: Were the authorities so cruel to most of the "evildoers"

Sherry W: Why were the people silent? What were they thinking?

Andrew: What did the 2 other evildoers do that they were to be crucified?

Murray: Who were "they" the people that didn't know what they were doing?

Jo: Why didn't Jesus save himself in front of everyone, but instead was resurrected quietly?

Danile: How small a step of faith is enough to be saved?

Lin: How much knowledge is necessary for salvation?

Sherry S: What happens to those that don't know they need to ask for salvation?

After the third reading, we mentioned the invitation we sensed from God coming from the text:

Sherry S: Ask for forgiveness

Jo: Remain true to a calling despite challenges

Gail: To treat people with integrity even when I am in power over them

Shabaun: Have faith in God and in his plans

Andrew: To search for the times when I treat others poorly. When "I know not what I do"

Lin: Be aware of my attitude and words towards others

Danile: To move "out of my head" to think about things. Interact with others in ways other than talking

Murray: Be aware beyond myself of God's kingdom through others

Sherry W: To respect life in general as God's gift to mankind (with respect to crucifixion)

## **Sunday, September 28, 2008**

Each of us was given a story figure representing someone in this story. We placed them on a table as we re-told the story, explaining why we placed them where we did.

### **Jesus**

Do we talk about what happened literally or figuratively?

Figuratively, Jesus is above the people and what is happening, separate.

Literally, he is between the thieves on the cross talking to the thieves

He is already talking to God and not focused on his physical situation

He doesn't respond to the cruel words of the rulers, soldiers and one thief. He only seems to hear the thief that asks to be remembered

We placed Jesus on a box to lift him up, closer to God. He is at the end of his journey and is moving away from the people of the Earth, to be in a new place.

### **Rulers**

We place the rulers at the front of the crown, watching. They were from families of influence and power. They were used to having power. They handled power using sarcasm. (not much different from evil-doer 1). They had seen Jesus gain respect of people and they were afraid of losing power. They wanted to keep the people afraid, not happy, to keep their power. They are inciting the crowd to built support.

We placed a paper over the Rulers because they were blind to his real power.

### **Soldiers**

They are away from the crowd. They might be from another province and not a part of the people. They wouldn't have had respect for Jesus or understood. They were following orders. They put up the sign, gave him sour wine. They were casually cruel. They were roman soldiers and not involved in religious matters. They were literal in their understanding of King and did not understand the spiritual matters. Clearly, Jesus was not powerful to them because he would not be on the cross. This was just another job for them.

### **Evil Doer 1**

Has probably done a bad thing and is a bad person. He mocks Christ and then wants Christ to save him. He is very self-centered.

In dire situations, people react differently. In his last hours of life he chooses to taunt someone who shares his fate.

We later placed the Evil doer 1 by the soldiers (his back to Jesus), because he was similar in a cruel mentality.

### **Evil Doer 2**

The evildoer 2 repents and went through s process on the cross to bring him to Jesus. He must have known who Jesus was and he saw the Jesus was being crucified for something he didn't deserve.

We placed him facing Jesus and raised up slightly (on his way to paradise)

### **People**

Why are the people silent? Are they afraid or reverent? Are they wondering what happened to this man that just came into town? People are there for many reasons. Some are reverent and some are scared.

## Sunday, October 5, 2008

One commentator has spoken of this story as a quest. A quest is a story in which:

- Someone comes to Jesus looking for something vital for human well-being
- There is an obstacle
- The obstacle is overcome, or not
- The quest is fulfilled, or not

We spent some time looking at this story as a quest.

In this story, what is the quest?

1. The good thief (evil-doer 2) he wants unconditional acceptance, salvation
2. Save yourself and save us (evil-doer 1)
3. Jesus as a human who came to Earth to save mankind
4. The rulers were on a quest for power and conformity

In this story, what is the obstacle?

1. He needed forgiveness. He has committed crimes and made poor choices.
2. He is looking for Jesus to be a leader that will give his people power over other people. Jesus' true nature is the obstacle. Soldiers and rulers were his obstacle
3. Rejection, suffering pain, fear, separation.
4. Jesus would not conform and being quiet. He threatened their power.

Is the obstacle overcome?

1. Yes. He asks to be saved spiritually and is not concerned with his physical body anymore. He represents mankind, who is sinful and can still ask for forgiveness
2. No
3. Yes and no? Some will be saved and some will not (just as with the thieves)
4. They might think so, but not really.

How is the obstacle overcome?

1. Asking for salvation
2. It is not
3. Forgiveness for the people. God's power to intervene.
4. It is not.

If not, why is the obstacle not overcome?

2. He is seeking the wrong thing
4. God is more powerful and able to overcome death.

What actions does this text call for?

It call us to move to action of some kind. Even if it is some small action.