

Sermon: A COLOSSAL CALLING

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Somesville Union Meeting House, UCC

July 3, 2011

Lectionary text: Matthew 11:28-30: *Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Poem: Emma Lazarus: *The New Colossus*

The *Colossus of Rhodes*, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, rising above the city, symbol of a great victory over Cyprus, the statue was built almost three hundred years before Jesus was born. Standing about 150 feet high and possibly on the highest point on the Greek island, Colossus was a symbol to its residents of peace through strength, and said to its neighbors, “don’t mess with us! The gods of Olympus are on our side.” The dedicatory text spoke of this Greek titan, Helios, God of the Sun, as being to them a torch of freedom and independence, then ends with the words, “to the decedents of Heraklis (Hercules) belongs dominion over sea and land.”

What many Americans do not know is that our beloved Statue of Liberty was built with the Colossus of Rhodes in mind. Twice his size, our Libertas stands as one of the greatest symbols of our country, and was the antithesis to the great Colossus. Libertas rose to great fame in Rome where she was beloved by many, especially slaves who had been liberated. Barely showing under her flowing robe are chains, symbolically pronouncing her call to liberty for all people. The seven rays in her crown symbolize the seven continents in the seven seas. Raising her torch to the sky, she stands, not to scare people away, but to light the way for people from around the world to find new life in this great land of the free.

Emma Lazarus wrote the inscription entitled, *The New Colossus*, on a plaque applied to the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty:

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman
With a torch, whose flame is the imprisoned lightning,
and her name: Mother of Exiles.
From her beacon hand glows world-wide welcome;*

*Her mild eyes command the air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she with silent lips.
“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”*

And Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.”

It was almost a year ago that I went to Tijuana, Mexico, for an immersion experience that I will never forget. It is still difficult for me to talk about it, but here goes.

First, we drove along the American side of the border to see the new, high-tech fences that we built with tax-payer dollars in an effort to keep the Mexicans out. It is estimated that the great wall on the Mexican border will cost \$40 billion dollars to build, then billions more annually to maintain and patrol.

Like makeshift memorials along our roadways, the families of Mexicans who were killed trying to get over or under the fence have lined the great wall with simple displays. Names, names, more names of men, women, and children who have died trying to find liberation here.

Liberation from what? Mexico is a free country, why would its citizens desire liberation?

We drove on.

We crossed the border and parked the van and went by foot to a village.

Built beside a dry riverbed was a monument to what the desperate can do with scrap metal and cardboard that we throw away by the tons. Hundreds of hovels built leaning one upon the other like dominoes waiting for a strong wind to topple them over, or even worse, a fire that would explode them into a pile of ashes, scrap, and death.

No plumbing. Community pit toilets. A long wait for the rains to send water flowing back into the riverbed so they could wash themselves, their clothes, their spirits.

A little boy was playing in the riverbed. Wearing only shorts and a pair of winter boots, it was obvious that nobody was watching him. A slight figure, nose running, it was obvious that he had little medical care. Alone, out in the open, like a rabbit becoming prey for a coyote, this little boy was there, defenseless from whatever or whoever might be about to pounce on him.

Why in the world would anyone live here?

Walk on.

Up a small hill and around the bend, there was the answer: a Panasonic plant. These Mexicans would walk to the plant where they would earn a few dollars a day assembling and packaging TV sets and other electronic gadgets to be trucked across the border and be sold to Americans.

Trucked across the border to the Promised Land where even poor people can afford a TV.

Trucked across the border where even soap opera images of American life seemed luxurious to them.

Trucked across the border, along with fruits and vegetables Mexicans worked hard to produce – while being paid an unlivable wage – only to be trucked off to Americans who flock to the market that advertises the lowest prices.

Mexicans do not want to risk their lives to get across the border for the sport of it. They do it out of desperation. They are poor, hungry, thirsty, enslaved. They want their children to have a better way of life; they want to protect them from abuse and neglect. They want them to receive an education, hope.

And Jesus said, “Come unto me.”

And Lady Liberty says, “Give me your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free.”

We, as Christian Americans, have a double calling.

The new Colossus is not found in poetic form alone, it is found in the turmoil of our hearts, minds, prayers, and limited resources.

Today’s new Colossus is the question, “What can we do about this?”