

The Irresistible Revolution
Living As an Ordinary Radical
6 pm Thursdays, March 7 – April 11
Meeting at St. Andrew Episcopal Church

Session Two – March 21
Chapters 6-7

Ch 6 – Economics of Rebirth

Layers of insulation separate the rich and the poor... obvious layers like picket fences and SUVs, and there are more subtle ones like charity... that allow us to appease our conscious and still maintain a distance from the poor.” P147 “It is much more comfortable to depersonalize the poor so we don’t feel responsible for the catastrophic human failure that results in someone sleeping on the street while people have spare bedrooms in their homes. We can volunteer... and never have to open up our homes, our beds, our dinner tables.” P. 148 “I have immense respect for social workers, but I also think Jesus would have failed some of his social work classes on “professional distance.” P148

“Faith based nonprofits can too easily be the mirror image of secular organizations, maintaining the same hierarchies of power and separation between rich and poor. They can too easily merely facilitate the exchange of goods and services, putting plenty of professionals in the middle to guarantee that the rich do not have to face the poor and that power does not shift... When the church becomes a place of brokerage rather than an organic community, she ceases to be alive.” P149

“Writing a check makes us feel good... Almost every time we talk with affluent

folks about God’s will to end poverty, someone says, “But didn’t Jesus say The Poor Will Always Be With You? Even though there are more than 2,000 scriptures that mention God’s concern for the poor, this is one of the most quoted.” P150

“Far from saying in defeat that we should not worry about the poor, since they will always be among us, Jesus is pointing the church to her true identity – She is to live close to those who suffer...I heard that Gandhi, when people asked him if he was a Christian, would often reply, Ask the Poor. They Will Tell You Who The Christians Are.” “Real justice goes deeper – it changes us, it keeps us up at night, it causes us to ache in our guts and to weep from the depths of our souls because we know by name the people.” P151

“The old saying goes, ‘Live simply that others may simply live.’ ... It’s too bad that living simply has to be so complicated. Responsible living is a paradox, as it often stirs up questions of privilege. It takes a lot of money or land to tread lightly on the earth.” P152 “One of my favorite sayings these days is ‘Simple living does not mean ugly living’. We can live in ways that are simple and responsible and beautiful... Our simplicity is not an ascetic denunciation of material things to attain personal piety, for

if we sell all that we have and give it to the poor, but have not love, it is meaningless... Rather than being bound up by how much stuff we need to buy, we can get enslaved to how simply we must live.”P153

“Early Christians taught that charity is merely returning what we have stolen... The early Christians said that if a child starves while a Christian has extra food, then the Christian is guilty of murder.” P155

“People who experiment in sharing may begin out of burden or guilt, but they are sustained by the matchless joy it brings.” P156 He tells the story of a beggar in Calcutta who approaches him, but all Shane has is gum, so he gives that. “Then she tore it into three pieces and handed one to me and one to my friend so we could share her excitement... The way we give money and possessions power is by holding them with clenched fists. The way we take away their power is by holding them with open hands... The best thing we can do with the best things in life is to give them away.” P157

Shane frames this as a form of fasting, longing for justice, placing the neighbor above ourselves. “Isaiah tells us, ‘Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, you see the naked, to clothe them, and not turn away from your own flesh and blood?’ One thing fasting does is sacrifice privilege... no wonder the Corinthian church is scolded for disgracing

the Lord’s Supper by allowing some people to come to the table hungry while others are stuffed. They were not reconciled with one another and needed first to leave the altar to care for their neighbors.” P159

“Poverty was created not by God, but by you and me, because we have not learned to love our neighbors as ourselves... in the Lord’s prayer we are taught to pray for our daily bread.” Not *my* daily bread. P160

Speaking of personal responsibility, Shane says that in God’s eyes your personal responsibility is to your poor neighbors, dismantling inequality... (does God leave you alone to achieve your own salvation? Then who are we to leave others alone to achieve?)

The vow of poverty is a fairly privileged notion, and the prosperity Gospel is utterly misguided, but there is a third theology, the theology of Enough, or Abundance. “after seeing plenty of poor folks forced into economic crimes... and after seeing plenty of rich folks so content in their riches that they forget they need God... I think we are ready for something new.” P162

“[Jesus] impressed this reality on the disciples as he commanded them not to take anything for their journey – No bag, no extra food, no clothes, no money, no shoes... The fact that he ordered them not to take these items implies that some of them had access to those things. But they are sent out not in the simple poverty of ascetic life but with a new vision of interdependence, trusting that God would provide for them. As they went into a town, others would open their homes to them.

And if not, they were to shake the dust from their feet and move on. The incredible thing is that this ensured not only that the church practiced hospitality, but that it would be *dependent* on hospitality. The line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was dissolved. All were dependent on God and one another in a new economy.” P166

“We need the imagination to dream what this sort of radical interdependence could look like. In our community, one question we continually revisit is health insurance. Many of us feel uneasy living without it, especially as we have kids entering our communal life. And yet it is difficult to use that privilege when many of our neighbors go without health care... (There are many great medical collectives. The one I am part of has been around for thirty-five years, and we shared more than \$500 million in medical bills. We share about \$15 million a year ... and every month we still get a newsletter reporting who is in the hospital so we can pray for each other, and so we know where our common pool of money is

going, not to yachts and private planes for executives, but to pay the bills of our brothers and sisters.” P168

“The common good is a wondrous idea. It’s always a challenge to love our neighbors as ourselves and to seek the common good as much as our own good. We have to be more innovative than the credit card companies and payday lenders... Love compels us to love people more than profits.” P173

Shane then shares several illustrations. A childless family that takes in a homeless woman, helps her through nursing school, and then the woman falls fatally ill, the nurse is there by her side, caring. A jewelry collective that puts an end to the blood-diamond industry by forming a fair-trade jewel industry. And he tells a story of coming into \$20,000 and using it to stage a demonstration dumping money on Wall Street – This is before the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Ch 7 – Pledging Allegiance When Kingdoms Collide

“I have become well acquainted with the dualism in the North American church. Once, after taking a trip to Iraq to protest the war, I went to Willow Creek and gave a talk titled ‘The Scandal of Grace’ Afterward, they explained to me that the pulpits are not for political messages. I thought about what would have happened if Reverend King hadn’t allowed the gospel to get political. My heart sank as I walked in to the foyer and noticed something I had never seen before: the American flag standing prominently in

front of the auditorium. And never before was I so heart broken that the cross was missing. For the flag and the cross are both spiritual. And they are both political. It is a dangerous day when we can take the cross out of the church more easily than the flag. No wonder it is hard for seekers to find God nowadays. It’s difficult to know where Christianity ends and America begins.” P181

“The English word politics derives from the Greek word POLIS... The word is rooted in the concepts of City, Civil, Citizen, Civic, basically what it means to be a society of people. Anything involving humans living together purposefully is political, a polis... Without a doubt, envisioning the radical countercultural values of God’s kingdom is by its essence political. Imagine the Gospels with every mention of king, kingdom, Lord, savior, crowns, banners, and thrones all edited out... The root of the word allegiance means, LORD, that what the early Christians were executed for, pledging an allegiance to another kingdom, another Lord – treason.” P182

“We vote every day by how we live, what we buy, and who we pledge allegiance to... What are we loyal to? Many are loyal to political parties, and most folks are faithful to their friends. Patriots are faithful to their countries. What are Christians loyal to?” P183

“It’s not surprising that the early Christians were labeled by imperial officials as ‘the faithless’. Over and over early Christian writings tell us of how Christians were branded atheists by the imperial courts and executed... they had lost all faith in the empire and had become faithful to God alone as the one who could preserve peace and prosperity... Describing Rome as the whoring seductress Babylon the Great, John (of Revelation) warns the Christians that the empire will entice them with a counterfeit splendor, and he warns against flirting with her pleasures and treasures, which will soon come to ruin.” P184

Shane then discusses September 11, and the strange acceleration of patriotism Christianity, the blending of the Bible and Flag. The desires for revenge and security along with the constant refrain of “God

Bless America. “This burst of nationalism reveals the deep longing we all have for community, a natural thirst for intimacy that liberals and progressive Christians would have done much better to acknowledge. September 11th shattered the self-sufficient, autonomous individual, and we saw a country of broken fragile people who longed for community – for people to cry with, be angry with, to suffer with. People did not want to be alone in their sorry, rage, and fear.” P 186

“[God] had a new definition of family, rooted in the idea that we are adopted as orphans into the family of God and that this rebirth creates a new kinship that runs deeper than biology, geography, or nationality... With new eyes, we can see that our family is both local and global, including but transcending biology, tribe, or nationality, a renewed vision of the kingdom of God with brothers and sisters in Afghanistan and Iraq.” P187

But back in Jesus’ age, just as in our own, family is one of the most significant barriers to potential risk takers who would leave everything for the way of the cross. This might explain why Jesus had some hard things to say about our earthly ties... Early allegiances create a myopia that stands in the way of God’s vision and justice, which is larger than tribe... violence is always rooted in a myopic sense of community, whether it is nationalism or gangs.” P190

Shane discusses mourning the victims of September 11, the soldiers killed, the Iraqi citizens killed, but also the 30,000 children who starve to death every day, like a ‘silent tsunami that just keeps happening’. He discusses close family members of victims who protest the use of their fallen loved

ones as an excuse for violence. “Our grief is not a cry for war.” P193

He then discusses the example that war sets for the young. Quoting MLK “I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. But they asked, and rightly so, what about Vietnam? They asked if our own nation wasn’t using massive doses of violence to solve its problems. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today – my own government” P194

Shane travels to Iraq for the month of March 2003- a month of extreme bombing in Iraq as part of the Shock and Awe campaign. “I went to Iraq to stand in the way of war. Thousands of soldiers have gone to Iraq, willing to kill people they do not know because of a political allegiance. I went willing to die for people I do not know because of a spiritual allegiance. May we stand by those who face the impending wrath of the empire and whisper ‘God loves you. I love you, and if my country bombs your country. I will be right here with you. Otherwise, our gospel has little integrity. As one of the saints said, ‘If they come for the innocent and do not pass over our bodies, then cursed be our religion.’” P 197

Shane makes friends with a homeless boy in Iraq, who is about 10. The boy is spicy and cheerful, but one day as they sit, the boy's face goes bleak. “He mimicked with his hand the falling of bombs and made the sound of explosions, as tears welled up in his eyes. Suddenly, he turned and latched onto my neck. He began to weep, his body shook as he gasped for each breath of air... Another day they had a birthday party for a

young girl named Amal, who was turning thirteen...” Bombs began to explode in the background... then one explosion hit very close. A couple of us huddled down with the children. I looked at this young teenager who had courage I could only dream of; she looked deep into my timid eyes and said, “It’s okay; don’t be scared.” And she smacked me on the head with a balloon. These children were raised hearing bombs, and yet they will still play in the park with people whose country is destroying theirs. The girl joked about how she might think differently about the war if Bush would bomb her school.” P199

The girl is asked what she wants for her birthday, and she replies Peace. “I was reminded once again that life is more powerful than death, that children can teach old tyrants and cynics how to love. I was reminded of the verses in Isaiah that prophesy the coming of a reconciled creation and people, where the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together. The last words in the verse are And the little child will lead them.” P200

Shane worships with Christians in Baghdad. “Afterwards I was able to meet with one of the bishops... the bishop went on to tell me that the church in the Middle East was deeply concerned about the church in the United States. He said, ‘Many Americans are for this war.’ I nodded. And he asked, ‘But what are the Christians saying?’ My heart sank. I tried to explain to him that many of the Christians in the US are confused and hope that this is a way God could liberate the Iraqi people. He shook his head and said, very humbly, ‘but we Christians do not believe that. We believe Blessed are the Peacemakers, we believe if

you pick up the sword, you die by the sword. We believe in the cross.’ Tears welled up in my eyes as he said, ‘we will be praying for you. We will be praying for the church in the US to be the church’” P201

Shane is in a car accident driving along a the Jordan border, and people in his car are badly hurt. They are alone, but a car of Iraqis picks them up and drives them to the hospital in Rutba. The hospital’s children’s wing had recently been bombed. “When they learned that several of us were from the US, the head doctor asked loudly, ‘Why this? Why? Why your government doing this?’ We had frequently asked the same question ourselves... So they could not take us to the hospital. He added in a dignified smile, ‘but you are our brothers, and we will take care of you. We take care of everyone – Christian, Muslim, Iraqi, American. It doesn’t matter. We are all human being. We are all sisters and brothers.’... We offered the doctors money, but they insisted that they were caring for us as family. They had only one request, to tell the world about Rutba.” P203

“And we did. We told the story hundreds of times, and the Rutba House in Durham is a living witness to how that experience moved us. But it was always a dream of ours to visit Rutba again. Seven years later, in 2010, we got to go back., the five of us in the car accident.... When they heard we were coming back just because we wanted to visit and rekindle friendship, they were deeply moved. Someone did mention that there were a few militants who might want to kill us, but it was only a few. And they slept beside our beds with AK47s to protect us (I often laugh about how this did not fit into my theory of nonviolence but I was grateful for the hospitality).” P204

Rutba is interested in creating a more permanent bond with the US, to have a Sister City there. Shane suggests Philly, but the Mayor said he had visited a city once that reminded him of Rutba, and he would like that city to be their Sister City. That City was Durham. Shane was moved by the strange coincidence that that was exactly where friends had started Rutba house. When the mayor heard this, he pledged to start a community of peace and reconciliation in Rutba called Durham House.

“Arab hospitality is something we experienced over and over again. I am convinced that had we wrecked in another area, there would have been another Rutba just around the corner... When the people of Rutba put their hands over their hearts as a sign of respect, it struck me how similar it looked to saluting the flag to pledge allegiance. It was all as if they touched their hearts to pledge to love and care for us, a beautiful sign of allegiance that runs deeper than nation... an allegiance whose banner is love.”... “People back home began to vigil... they had gathered not in the polarizing anger of street protest but in the quiet, revolutionary subordination that influential Mennonite theologian John Howers Yoder speaks of. Revolutionary subordination exposes the evils of power and violence without mimicking the, by gently allowing them to destroy themselves and then rising above the ruins. This approach, of course, is exemplified by Jesus, who was led like, ‘a lamb to the slaughter’” P206

“God have mercy on us sinners, for the mess we have made of your world... One of the things that became painfully clear to me in Iraq is that what’s at stake today is the reputation not just of America, but of

Christianity, and that's what keeps me up at nights. I heard people in Iraq call leaders in the US Christian Extremists." P207

"A woman in the US came up to me after I had spoken about my time in Iraq and told me with deep sincerity that she wasn't really very political, she just wanted Muslim folks in Iraq to come to know the love and grace of Jesus. I told her that is exactly what I want. We considered together the ethos of our world and asked the questions. Are Muslim people any closer to understanding the gospel of peace and the God of love? The answer was quite clear as we sat in prayerful silence." P208

"Over and over soldiers have come to me with tears in their eyes, pouring out their inner conflict as they feel their spiritual and national allegiances collide. Soldiers have come to the altar to ask for forgiveness for what they did in Iraq. One young soldier came forward for an altar call in which I invited people to disarm and lay their burdens on the altar. He said that he was on one of the ships that fired the Tomahawk missiles into Baghdad while I was there, and now he was living with that. And we prayed and cried... another soldier came up to me and said, 'I have been all over the world with the military. I was in Afghanistan. I was in Iraq.' With tears in his eyes he told me about his struggle... and he handed me his dog tags."

Shane is friends with Veteran Charlie Litky. "One of the things he taught me is that veterans often know the horrors of war better than anyone. We can see it in the

suicide rate (one a day for soldiers, 22 a day for vets) and in the rate of homelessness and addiction. When we fight for peace, we are fighting for them. We honor the men and women of this country by trying to put an end to war. I remember Charlie holding a sign... 'I hate war as only a veteran can.' It reminded me of the words of Ernest Hemingway, 'Never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime. As the infantry and ask the dead.' P211

"We must be willing to create a safer, more sustainable world. And I believe God has given us a vision for that. A vision that looks very different from the dreams of America. One soldier I met returned from Iraq deeply disturbed. He said, 'I just risked my life for the American dream, and I am not even sure I believe in it anymore'."

"Nearly every denomination in the World Council of Churches declared that the war in Iraq was not God's will and not in line with Christian tradition, including Just-War theory. The pope spoke out and sent a convoy to Baghdad while we were there. Evangelical theologians from all over the earth have written extensively about the war in Iraq and its alternatives...I have been refreshed to see a global church with integrity, a church that does not suffer the polarization and dualism of evangelicalism in the United States." P213

"The problem is not that we have tried the way of Jesus and it failed, but that we haven't really tried the way of Jesus very often." P213

When we here 'we' are being attacked, do we think 'we' the church, or 'we' as Americans? What is our primary identity? When the Bush administration said that a way of life was being attacked, it was true, but was it the gospel that was being attacked?