

You're in Charge and I'm Not

by Robin Morgan

In my continuing quest to understand what is going on with our country, the other day I realized that the closest I can come to making sense of our newfound patriotic zeal and willingness to sacrifice our freedom for supposed safety is by comparing it to the way my husband and I were acting shortly before we discovered our sons were using drugs.

We knew something was terribly wrong in our family. From being a happy crew of five, eating dinner together, going to Little League games and enjoying each other's company, we'd become five individuals who were in the process of tearing each other apart.

Hal and I had different ways of dealing with this new reality, but our goal was the same – get back to the way things had been before. I favored the clamp down method – take away privileges and make it utterly clear we would not tolerate the way the boys were treating us. Hal had a more irenic style. He would do whatever it took as mediator, go-between or truce maker to keep everybody in the house, no matter how painful it was.

Not until we took the boys to a psychologist who told us that our 17-year-old was a level one alcoholic and his 15-year-old brother was on the same path did we really face what was going on. We were at a crossroads. Did we refute or ignore this news, assume that the psychologist was exaggerating or just plain wrong? Did we keep doing what we'd been doing, fighting with each other and the kids, hoping something might change? Or did we listen to the psychologist and act on his suggestions?

It was a horrific time. Whether or not our family and our marriage would survive intact was hanging in the balance. The

happy past was gone, the present was chaotic, the future an impenetrable blur.

If I prayed at all during this time, it was only in frantic sound bytes: "Help!" or "Why us?" or even "I hate you" when all seemed lost as it did so often that one summer.

But somehow we decided to try out the psychologist's advice and ended up in the office of a 22-year-old self-described recovering dope fiend who had the audacity to tell us that if we did exactly what he told us to do, there was hope.

An upper middle class, middle-aged married couple, a lawyer and a pastor, putting the life of their family in the hands of a 22-year-old drug addict? If you're desperate enough...

Little by little, step-by-step, things began to change. We did what we were told to do by this unlikely soul and life started to come into focus again, but it wasn't what it had been like before all the chaos started. On some primal level, Hal and I had always assumed that if we did the right things, raised our kids the right way, we were guaranteed a happy family. If we did what we were supposed to do, we got the pay-off we wanted. But there are no guarantees in life. Both of our sons have been sober for over two years now and our family has a newfound serenity that I still marvel at when we sit around the table laughing and talking together, but there are no guarantees.

I'm hoping that as you have read our story you've been making some connections to our national scene. We are demanding guarantees, demanding that our government do whatever it takes to get us back to that happy past. We must have been doing the right things then because we've become so prosperous. Surely God is on our side.

A few weeks ago I was in a class with a group of people talking

about these issues in light of Jeremiah's temple sermon (ch.7). As the discussion heated up and a certain frantic quality began to creep into the voices of the people around the table ("What can we do, what can we do?") one man suggested that we can't really get to our leaders anymore, the only things we can do are to act ethically with our immediate neighbors.

I pointed out that Jeremiah wasn't only concerned with how the Judeans treated their neighbors, but he went after Josiah the king as well. Then our teacher reminded us that Jeremiah's ultimate critique didn't stop there either. It wasn't just how the people and the leaders treated each other, it was their disregard for their relationship with Yahweh that Jeremiah claimed was their downfall. "Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'" (7:4) They presumed that they could do whatever they wanted to because Yahweh lived in the temple in Jerusalem. They were safe.

Our future is an impenetrable blur. Some of us favor the clamp down method of retrieving the past, some of us favor keeping us all together no matter how much we attack and wound each other in the process.

I can't see what's ahead, but I have started a new prayer regimen in the last few weeks that I learned from the teenaged dope fiends in my life. Every morning before I start my day, I get down on my knees and I pray, "You're in charge and I'm not." It may seem simplistic, certainly not the complex economic and political answers we need to shore up our wobbling world. But I've watched such humility snatch messed up teenagers back from the brink of certain death.

You'd be surprised how hard it is to get down on your knees (irrespective of physical conditioning) and say that every

morning. I've become aware of how much I have in common with Adam and Eve as I alternately conveniently forget, think I'm too busy or even become angry at the prospect of "hitting my knees."

Interestingly, as I've reflected on this new regimen, I've realized that there is no way I could have come to this point, acknowledged my utter dependence on our Creator if I didn't first of all know that Creator as Abba. I have no intention of ladling sweet Jesus juice over what I've already said, it would be a disgrace to our Lord and a disgrace to the significance of what transpires among people with addictions when they come together to support and encourage one another.

But I realize that I have the luxury of allowing myself to embrace the freefall of looking at our family and the world as they really are because I know that no matter how far I fall, His hands are still underneath me and that He never leaves me alone. I know I have only minimal understanding of how hearing the Gospel, partaking of the sacrament, praying and fellowshiping with other Christians has wrought this conviction in my being, but it continues to grow inside of me. Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit continues to infuse me with hope when there is no earthly reason to hope.

Amazingly, it is Jeremiah who offers us one of the most compelling pictures of such new covenant hope even in the midst of the political and economic chaos of his time:

"I will put my law within them, says the Lord, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."
(31:33,34)