

Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 engl. XIII

3/25 - 3/31/2008

Sayre – Oklahoma City, OK

3/25/2008

Sayre – Rte. 44

It's already early afternoon when I start from Sayre: The highway is completely straight, smoothly rolling hills, uphill, then downhill. I am learning new chorals by heart – today a song “O wonderful day, o joyful time”; and I am having a overwhelming Eastern experience.

On both sides of the road there are huge fields with fresh sprouting wheat seed. In the right hand side the sun paints the young plants in a bright light green, on the left hand side the green is dark and saturate. The sky is light blue.

In this simple, beautiful landscape the words of this Eastern song and the cheerful melody touch me deeply and fill me with a deep feeling of thankfulness:

O wonderful day, o joyful time,

Jesus lives now without all suffering.

He is resurrected from death.

We are freed from all the pain,

O wonderful day, o joyful time!

O wonderful day, o joyful time,

All our sins are forgiven.

We are absolved from our guilt.

We are just through God's grace.

O wonderful day, o joyful time.

The feelings of joy are increasing. Everything that was difficult in the last years – shortcomings, failures, sorrows, tensions, hostility – in connection with our involvement for the preservation of the nature area near the German border and with Transatlantic21 – are dissolved in the shining light of this spring afternoon. I experience it as it has been transformed into compost, into natural, fertile garden mold, compost for my life, compost for the seed around me.

O wonderful day, o joyful time!

Death has been overcome today.

We don't have to be afraid of it anymore.

We can trust in Christ's victory.

O wonderful day, o joyful time.

I am feeling so light, so relieved, and deeply happy. I cry out of joy, about this spring day, about this moment where everything is good.

O wonderful day, o joyful time!

Keep, Jesus, our joy alive,

So that we can say, here and always,

With cheerful tongue:

“O wonderful day, o happy time!”

Jason passes me. He turns his car, drives back. “Why do you walk?” His face is very sensitive. He is about 30, pale, lean. He has two ear piercings. He sympathizes deeply with the SUNwalk. “You know, I work in the oil fields, in Texas. A good salary - just in order to make a living – I am having a family; but I see it the same way as you do. It’s time for action. Are you sure you don’t want a ride to Cordell?” Jason would have made a big detour if I had accepted his offer.

I put up my tent, next to some small wizened trees. I am almost in dreamland, when I hear a rustling noise outside of my tent. And then I smell the typical smell of a skunk. “Keep quiet, don’t startle him!” I think. I remain motionless until the visitor has disappeared again.

3/26/2008

Route 44 – Cordell, OK

Between a creek and a little farm I see a bizarre frozen tree ballet. The big trees are standing on an even meadow, with quite a distance between each other. There are some trees where only the trunk is left. One of them has a tortuous form, like an old dancer’s body which is spinning towards the sky. Another one stands there, stiff, bent forward, like broken hearted. Other trees forge their branches into the air, like dancing arms. Where the ice storm has broken branches, younger ones reach out into all kind of directions. They appear like a dancing Shiva. Whereas more and more other trees are swathed into their green spring costumes, these old dancers are still leafless and naked.

Once I see a scene of destruction. A huge mobile home fell from the road. It was torn apart. The wreck was left there. Debris, wreckage parts, doors, windows are scattered around the destroyed home. The field next to this heap of rubble scene seems to do everything to increase the beauty around this ugliness. There is a huge purple carpet of small labiate flowers, as far as I can see. Again and again, every day more, these purple flower carpets appear now in the landscape, in front of houses, on the soft shoulder of the highway, on meadows. The small flowers crown a fine stem with several levels of leaf cockades. The blossoms are tiny little, almost transparent purple fennels. The lower part has the shape of a reversed heart with four small darker dots. Tender stamens with miniature golden cushions come out of the depths of this little calyx.

Evening – I am arriving in Cordell. The straight highway goes down, for about two miles, directly towards a huge monumental building. There are four big white Ionian columns, a Dorian frieze, 21 red steps leading up to the entrance of the Washita County Courthouse. Like in Sayre, the courthouse stands in the middle of the town, in the middle of the main street. Not even the straightest way can avoid the prestigious building – premonition of the Day of Judgment? Intimidating memorial for patriotism and piety?

But there is some patina after all these years; and the good influence of the courthouse on the district could be fading. Therefore there is a scaffold around the old dome – a big restoration project is going on.

In the local newspaper “The Cordell Beacon” there is a front page article “A New Dome planned for an Old Beauty”, with several pictures. One shows the laying of the foundation stone, another one the courthouse under construction in 1911. On a picture of 1949 the courthouse is barely visible because of big trees. There is an old timer vehicle parked in front of the house, and next to it a parked tractor. Local historian Wayne Boothe said the tractor belonged to a gentleman who lived approximately four miles out of town and he would drive the tractor to Cordell several times a week – like the movie with the guy who made a several hundred mile journey with his lawn mower in order to see his sick brother for

reconciliation. Anyway, the lady at the local newspaper says it all: “We are proud of our courthouse.”

But not only the courthouse calls people of the district to live a decent life. There is also a green sign somewhere on the road – white letters on green background - that says: “Where will you spend eternity – Heaven or Hell?”

3/27/2008

Cordell – Eakly

Near Mobeetie in Texas I read once on a memorial stone: “Site of Fort Elliott, established June 5, 1875, one of the last forts established in Texas for the purpose of clearing the region of Indians. Around it Mobeetie , Rendez-vous of buffalo hunters and traders, grew up. The post was abandoned in 1889.”

And today I read on a historical marker: “Seeger Colony, 4 miles N. Begun by Cheyenne and Arapaho in 1886 under US supervisor John H. Seeger, the Indians’ friend and Oklahoma pioneer. Seeger Indian Industrial School opened there 1893.”

These are words, once about genocide, once about cooperation, respect, and education - not far away from each other, in location and time. Also there and then individuals made a difference. They contributed with their attitude and actions whether we have heaven or hell here on earth.

“Why did they cut trees here at this idyllic spot?” I ask myself when I see several cut trees near a pretty brook. But soon my reluctance vanishes when I see the typical conical gnawing marks of a castor as the cause of this tree cutting action. I wait for the woodcutter for a while but it doesn’t show up.

3/28.2008

Eakly – Minco

After a night in the tent on a clearing and two hours of walking I arrive in the little town of Binger. “Home of Johnny Bench”, is written at the entrance of the village. In the restaurant I learn who he is: Born in 1947, Johnny is a former baseball player with the Cincinnati Reds (1967 -1983), one of the most famous baseball catchers. As a boy he grows up in this small town. He dreams to become a baseball player. His father advises him to become a catcher. He makes his dream true.

As a child of old parents I like many aged people: In Cordell, on my way from the supermarket to the motel, I encounter Hollis Brown, a noble tall man, 93 years old. He inspects the new sidewalk that has been built there. “Where do you live?” he asks me. “Switzerland.” He laughs. “I thought you live here. I have relatives in Switzerland, called Leiser.” Then he tells me his life story. His parents separated when he was 3. He had to work already as a child. He didn’t attend many years of school; but he made an astonishing career, as a stock market broker, real estate business man, and as a politician – he managed the Town of Clinton as a Town Commissioner. Still today he works as a business man and teaches stock brokers and real estate people. “The challenges made you strong.” “You reckon,” he smiles, with satisfaction.

Here in Binger I meet Adams, the 86 year old owner of a grocery store. There are not many shelves, but there is a perfect order. He has clear, cheerful eyes. He is moving a cold cigar with his lips from one side of the mouth to the other. “I walk also every day!” I would like to buy some fruit. He comes with me to a freezer. There is one Red Delicious apple left, but it has a bad spot, so I don’t take it. He gives it to me: “For free. I hate to spoil food”. And surprisingly, it’s one of the best apples I had for a long time.

At dusk I am looking for a camping site. I find a good spot behind a boschage, on a pasture. When I look around more carefully I see several black bulls, not too far away. I take James and go on. It’s getting dark when I arrive at the hamlet of Minco. I see a nice house with a backyard, with an even lawn. An elder man opens the door. He allows me to camp in their backyard. In the morning they invite me to the house for coffee. Ray gives me a gift, one of his beautiful wooden pens that

he has turned in a lathe. Marilyn has overcome some initial fear that she had when this stranger arrived in the dark. She welcomes me cordially. I leave them with a warm heart.

3/29 – 3/31/2008

Oklahoma City

In Mustang, a town just before Oklahoma City, there is one church next to the other – Baptists, Methodist, the Church of Christ of the Mormons, Pentecost Adventists, Jehovah's witnesses, Family New Beginning Church, and others. I have never seen so many churches together, not even in Rome or Jerusalem; but there is also an Italian restaurant. Luigi the waiter has time in the almost empty big hall to leer at the television set from time to time. A soccer game between Lazio Roma and AC Milan is shown on a RAI channel. In the meantime I enjoy very much the eggplant parmesan dish, after all these weeks of omelets and burritos.

It's still a long stretch to Oklahoma City. The small highway 152 becomes a big 6 lane freeway. In large curves it leads me around the World airport of Oklahoma City towards the town. In a car these distances are driven quickly, but walking it almost never ends. Now I am in a quiet hotel at Meridian Street. In the lobby there are real palm trees and green plants. There is a business center where I can write the whole day. Tomorrow I will meet Andi Hoffmann in the evening, for several days of hiking together – another highlight of my trip, in the middle between L. A. and Washington D.C.

Marianne New sent me this speech of Barack Obama. I would like to share it with you:

REMARKS OF SENATOR BARACK OBAMA: 'A MORE PERFECT UNION'

Philadelphia, PA | March 18, 2008

As Prepared for Delivery

"We the people, in order to form a more perfect union."

Two hundred and twenty one years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America's improbable experiment in democracy. Farmers and scholars; statesmen and patriots who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their declaration of independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the spring of 1787.

The document they produced was eventually signed but ultimately unfinished. It was stained by this nation's original sin of slavery, a question that divided the colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate until the founders chose to allow the slave trade to continue for at least twenty more years, and to leave any final resolution to future generations.

Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution - a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.

And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part - through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk - to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign - to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run

for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together - unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction - towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own American story.

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners - an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.

It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional candidate. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts - that out of many, we are truly one.

Throughout the first year of this campaign, against all predictions to the contrary, we saw how hungry the American people were for this message of unity. Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate Flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African Americans and white Americans.

This is not to say that race has not been an issue in the campaign. At various stages in the campaign, some commentators have deemed me either "too black" or "not black enough." We saw racial tensions bubble to the surface during the week

before the South Carolina primary. The press has scoured every exit poll for the latest evidence of racial polarization, not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well.

And yet, it has only been in the last couple of weeks that the discussion of race in this campaign has taken a particularly divisive turn.

On one end of the spectrum, we've heard the implication that my candidacy is somehow an exercise in affirmative action; that it's based solely on the desire of wide-eyed liberals to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap. On the other end, we've heard my former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, use incendiary language to express views that have the potential not only to widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation; that rightly offend white and black alike.

I have already condemned, in unequivocal terms, the statements of Reverend Wright that have caused such controversy. For some, nagging questions remain. Did I know him to be an occasionally fierce critic of American domestic and foreign policy? Of course. Did I ever hear him make remarks that could be considered controversial while I sat in church? Yes. Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely - just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests, or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed.

But the remarks that have caused this recent firestorm weren't simply controversial. They weren't simply a religious leader's effort to speak out against perceived injustice. Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country - a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam.

As such, Reverend Wright's comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity; racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems - two wars, a terrorist threat, a

falling economy, a chronic health care crisis and potentially devastating climate change; problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all.

Given my background, my politics, and my professed values and ideals, there will no doubt be those for whom my statements of condemnation are not enough. Why associate myself with Reverend Wright in the first place, they may ask? Why not join another church? And I confess that if all that I knew of Reverend Wright were the snippets of those sermons that have run in an endless loop on the television and You Tube, or if Trinity United Church of Christ conformed to the caricatures being peddled by some commentators, there is no doubt that I would react in much the same way

But the truth is, that isn't all that I know of the man. The man I met more than twenty years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith, a man who spoke to me about our obligations to love one another; to care for the sick and lift up the poor. He is a man who served his country as a U.S. Marine; who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and who for over thirty years led a church that serves the community by doing God's work here on Earth - by housing the homeless, ministering to the needy, providing day care services and scholarships and prison ministries, and reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

In my first book, *Dreams From My Father*, I described the experience of my first service at Trinity:

"People began to shout, to rise from their seats and clap and cry out, a forceful wind carrying the reverend's voice up into the rafters....And in that single note - hope! - I heard something else; at the foot of that cross, inside the thousands of churches across the city, I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones. Those stories - of survival, and freedom, and hope - became our story, my story; the blood that had spilled was our blood, the tears our tears; until this black church, on this bright day, seemed once more a vessel carrying the story of a people into future generations and into a larger world.

Our trials and triumphs became at once unique and universal, black and more than black; in chronicling our journey, the stories and songs gave us a means to reclaim memories that we didn't need to feel shame about...memories that all people might study and cherish - and with which we could start to rebuild."

That has been my experience at Trinity. Like other predominantly black churches across the country, Trinity embodies the black community in its entirety - the doctor and the welfare mom, the model student and the former gang-banger. Like other black churches, Trinity's services are full of raucous laughter and sometimes bawdy humor. They are full of dancing, clapping, screaming and shouting that may seem jarring to the untrained ear. The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and yes, the bitterness and bias that make up the black experience in America.

And this helps explain, perhaps, my relationship with Reverend Wright. As imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me. He strengthened my faith, officiated my wedding, and baptized my children. Not once in my conversations with him have I heard him talk about any ethnic group in derogatory terms, or treat whites with whom he interacted with anything but courtesy and respect. He contains within him the contradictions - the good and the bad - of the community that he has served diligently for so many years.

I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my white grandmother - a woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe.

These people are a part of me. And they are a part of America, this country that I love.

Some will see this as an attempt to justify or excuse comments that are simply inexcusable. I can assure you it is not. I suppose the politically safe thing would be

to move on from this episode and just hope that it fades into the woodwork. We can dismiss Reverend Wright as a crank or a demagogue, just as some have dismissed Geraldine Ferraro, in the aftermath of her recent statements, as harboring some deep-seated racial bias.

But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America - to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality.

The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through - a part of our union that we have yet to perfect. And if we walk away now, if we simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care, or education, or the need to find good jobs for every American.

Understanding this reality requires a reminder of how we arrived at this point. As William Faulkner once wrote, "The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past." We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.

Segregated schools were, and are, inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them, fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students.

Legalized discrimination - where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions, or the police force, or fire departments - meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations.

That history helps explain the wealth and income gap between black and white, and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persists in so many of today's urban and rural communities.

A lack of economic opportunity among black men, and the shame and frustration that came from not being able to provide for one's family, contributed to the erosion of black families - a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened. And the lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods - parks for kids to play in, police walking the beat, regular garbage pick-up and building code enforcement - all helped create a cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continue to haunt us.

This is the reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up. They came of age in the late fifties and early sixties, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted. What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but rather how many men and women overcame the odds; how many were able to make a way out of no way for those like me who would come after them.

But for all those who scratched and clawed their way to get a piece of the American Dream, there were many who didn't make it - those who were ultimately defeated, in one way or another, by discrimination. That legacy of defeat was passed on to future generations - those young men and increasingly young women who we see standing on street corners or languishing in our prisons, without hope or prospects for the future. Even for those blacks who did make it, questions of race, and racism, continue to define their worldview in fundamental ways. For the men and women of Reverend Wright's generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away; nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years. That anger may not get expressed in public, in front of white co-workers or white friends. But it does find voice in the barbershop or around the kitchen table. At times, that anger is exploited by politicians, to gin up votes along racial lines, or to make up for a politician's own failings.

And occasionally it finds voice in the church on Sunday morning, in the pulpit and

in the pews. The fact that so many people are surprised to hear that anger in some of Reverend Wright's sermons simply reminds us of the old truism that the most segregated hour in American life occurs on Sunday morning. That anger is not always productive; indeed, all too often it distracts attention from solving real problems; it keeps us from squarely facing our own complicity in our condition, and prevents the African-American community from forging the alliances it needs to bring about real change. But the anger is real; it is powerful; and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races.

In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience - as far as they're concerned, no one's handed them anything, they've built it from scratch. They've worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pension dumped after a lifetime of labor. They are anxious about their futures, and feel their dreams slipping away; in an era of stagnant wages and global competition, opportunity comes to be seen as a zero sum game, in which your dreams come at my expense. So when they are told to bus their children to a school across town; when they hear that an African American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they're told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced, resentment builds over time.

Like the anger within the black community, these resentments aren't always expressed in polite company. But they have helped shape the political landscape for at least a generation. Anger over welfare and affirmative action helped forge the Reagan Coalition. Politicians routinely exploited fears of crime for their own electoral ends. Talk show hosts and conservative commentators built entire careers unmasking bogus claims of racism while dismissing legitimate discussions of racial injustice and inequality as mere political correctness or reverse racism.

Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the real culprits of the middle class squeeze -

a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many. And yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist, without recognizing they are grounded in legitimate concerns - this too widens the racial divide, and blocks the path to understanding.

This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy - particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own.

But I have asserted a firm conviction - a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people - that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.

For the African-American community, that path means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances - for better health care, and better schools, and better jobs - to the larger aspirations of all Americans -- the white woman struggling to break the glass ceiling, the white man whose been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family. And it means taking full responsibility for own lives - by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny.

Ironically, this quintessentially American - and yes, conservative - notion of self-help found frequent expression in Reverend Wright's sermons. But what my former pastor too often failed to understand is that embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society can change.

The profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society was static; as if no progress has been made; as if this country - a country that has made it possible for one of his own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black; Latino and Asian, rich and poor, young and old -- is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. But what we know -- what we have seen - is that America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope - the audacity to hope - for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

In the white community, the path to a more perfect union means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination - and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past - are real and must be addressed. Not just with words, but with deeds - by investing in our schools and our communities; by enforcing our civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system; by providing this generation with ladders of opportunity that were unavailable for previous generations. It requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams; that investing in the health, welfare, and education of black and brown and white children will ultimately help all of America prosper.

In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world's great religions demand - that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister's keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.

For we have a choice in this country. We can accept a politics that breeds division, and conflict, and cynicism. We can tackle race only as spectacle - as we did in the OJ trial - or in the wake of tragedy, as we did in the aftermath of Katrina - or as fodder for the nightly news. We can play Reverend Wright's sermons on every channel, every day and talk about them from now until the election, and make the only question in this campaign whether or not the American people think that I somehow believe or sympathize with his most offensive words. We can pounce on

some gaffe by a Hillary supporter as evidence that she's playing the race card, or we can speculate on whether white men will all flock to John McCain in the general election regardless of his policies.

We can do that.

But if we do, I can tell you that in the next election, we'll be talking about some other distraction. And then another one. And then another one. And nothing will change.

That is one option. Or, at this moment, in this election, we can come together and say, "Not this time." This time we want to talk about the crumbling schools that are stealing the future of black children and white children and Asian children and Hispanic children and Native American children. This time we want to reject the cynicism that tells us that these kids can't learn; that those kids who don't look like us are somebody else's problem. The children of America are not those kids, they are our kids, and we will not let them fall behind in a 21st century economy. Not this time.

This time we want to talk about how the lines in the Emergency Room are filled with whites and blacks and Hispanics who do not have health care; who don't have the power on their own to overcome the special interests in Washington, but who can take them on if we do it together.

This time we want to talk about the shuttered mills that once provided a decent life for men and women of every race, and the homes for sale that once belonged to Americans from every religion, every region, every walk of life. This time we want to talk about the fact that the real problem is not that someone who doesn't look like you might take your job; it's that the corporation you work for will ship it overseas for nothing more than a profit.

This time we want to talk about the men and women of every color and creed who serve together, and fight together, and bleed together under the same proud flag. We want to talk about how to bring them home from a war that never should've been authorized and never should've been waged, and we want to talk about how

we'll show our patriotism by caring for them, and their families, and giving them the benefits they have earned.

I would not be running for President if I didn't believe with all my heart that this is what the vast majority of Americans want for this country. This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected. And today, whenever I find myself feeling doubtful or cynical about this possibility, what gives me the most hope is the next generation - the young people whose attitudes and beliefs and openness to change have already made history in this election.

There is one story in particular that I'd like to leave you with today - a story I told when I had the great honor of speaking on Dr. King's birthday at his home church, Ebenezer Baptist, in Atlanta.

There is a young, twenty-three year old white woman named Ashley Baia who organized for our campaign in Florence, South Carolina. She had been working to organize a mostly African-American community since the beginning of this campaign, and one day she was at a roundtable discussion where everyone went around telling their story and why they were there.

And Ashley said that when she was nine years old, her mother got cancer. And because she had to miss days of work, she was let go and lost her health care. They had to file for bankruptcy, and that's when Ashley decided that she had to do something to help her mom.

She knew that food was one of their most expensive costs, and so Ashley convinced her mother that what she really liked and really wanted to eat more than anything else was mustard and relish sandwiches. Because that was the cheapest way to eat.

She did this for a year until her mom got better, and she told everyone at the roundtable that the reason she joined our campaign was so that she could help the millions of other children in the country who want and need to help their parents too.

Now Ashley might have made a different choice. Perhaps somebody told her along the way that the source of her mother's problems were blacks who were on welfare and too lazy to work, or Hispanics who were coming into the country illegally. But she didn't. She sought out allies in her fight against injustice.

Anyway, Ashley finishes her story and then goes around the room and asks everyone else why they're supporting the campaign. They all have different stories and reasons. Many bring up a specific issue. And finally they come to this elderly black man who's been sitting there quietly the entire time. And Ashley asks him why he's there. And he does not bring up a specific issue. He does not say health care or the economy. He does not say education or the war. He does not say that he was there because of Barack Obama. He simply says to everyone in the room, "I am here because of Ashley."

"I'm here because of Ashley." By itself, that single moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man is not enough. It is not enough to give health care to the sick, or jobs to the jobless, or education to our children.

But it is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger. And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the two-hundred and twenty one years since a band of patriots signed that document in Philadelphia, that is where the perfection begins.

Here some additional good news:

SoCal Edison to build \$875 million solar energy installation

By ALEX VEIGA, AP Business Writer

Thursday, March 27, 2008

Southern California Edison Co. plans to build the nation's largest solar energy installation — an array of collector cells covering two square miles of rooftops that could power about 162,000 homes, the utility announced Thursday.

Edison said it asked state regulators for approval to begin installing the technology on the rooftops of commercial buildings throughout the region over the next five years.

The project would cost an estimated \$875 million.

Edison hopes to mount the first cells immediately on buildings in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, with some sites operational as soon as August.

"These new solar stations, which we will be installing at a rate of one megawatt a week, will provide a new source of clean energy, directly in the fast-growing regions where we need it most," said John E. Bryson, chairman and chief executive of Edison International, the utility's parent company.

A one-megawatt power plant running continuously at full capacity can power 778 households a year, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The cells convert sunlight into electricity by using solar rays to trigger an electric current through a chemical reaction.

The array of solar cells placed atop commercial building rooftops across Southern California would generate 250 megawatts of electricity.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger praised the project.

"If commercial buildings statewide partnered with utilities to put this solar technology on their rooftops, it would set off a huge wave of renewable energy growth," Schwarzenegger said.

Florida-based utility FPL Energy LLC has also sought approval from the state to build a solar energy project in California.

The company's proposed Beacon Solar Energy Project would involve more than 500,000 parabolic mirrors assembled in rows on 2,000 acres in the Mojave Desert north of Los Angeles.

The project, which would generate 250 megawatts of power, was expected to take about two years to complete.

Solar power from the project will be used to make steam for a turbine generator connected to an electricity grid.

The combined 500 megawatts produced by the FPL and Edison projects would increase the state's solar power flowing to the state electricity grid by just more than 50 percent.

Rosemead-based Edison provides power to 13 million people in central and Southern California.

Electric Car System Planned in Denmark

Thursday March 27, 2:20 pm ET

By Jan M. Olsen, Associated Press Writer

Electric Car System Planned in Denmark by 2011 Using Surplus Wind Power

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) -- Denmark's DONG Energy A/S and a Silicon Valley-based startup firm said Thursday they would install an electric car network that includes about 20,000 recharging stations in the Scandinavian nation.

The grid, expected to be ready by 2011, will be operated by Project Better Place, an initiative by Israeli-American entrepreneur Shai Agassi, using excess power from DONG Energy's wind turbines.

A fleet of battery-driven electrical vehicles will be introduced in Denmark after the recharging stations are built at parking lots and outside homes, Agassi said.

French car maker Renault will provide the vehicles and Japan's Nissan will make the lithium-ion batteries under a partnership with Project Better Place announced earlier this year. Agassi said other car makers and battery producers would join the project later.

The battery would allow a car to drive a maximum of 150 kilometers (90 miles) before recharging, he said, adding that he expects the network to expand to other European countries soon.

"We're in discussion with 30 countries -- Europe, America and Asian nations," he told The Associated Press after a news conference in Copenhagen.

A similar network is being built in Israel.

When Israel's network was endorsed by the government there in January, supporters hailed it as a bold step in the battle against global warming and energy dependency, but skeptics warned that much could still go wrong.

DONG Energy chief executive Anders Eldrup told reporters that the grid would run on excess energy that its wind turbines generate on windy days. Windmills make up around 20 percent of Denmark's electricity production.

"The extra energy we have, we can use in an intelligent way by putting it in batteries," Eldrup told reporters.

However, on days with no wind the grid would need to use energy from DONG's coal-fired plants, he said, adding that it would still be more environmentally friendly than having cars running on gasoline.

"The cars' CO₂ emission would still be half of what it is today with fossil fuels," Eldrup said.

DONG Energy operates some of the thousands of windmills that dot Denmark, a country of 5.4 million. The small Scandinavian nation began a national windmill program in 1979 under pressure from organizations demanding new sources of electricity that have less of an effect on the environment than conventional plants.