

Exploring the Scriptures – A Sacred Conversation with David Bong

June 23, 2013 at Lynn Valley United Church, North Vancouver

David Bong, is an artist (photographer) displaying the collection "Faces of Humanity" in the Lynn Valley United Church Gallery, and was invited to speak about his inspiration and philosophy.

### **David Bong speaking about spirituality**

May I ask you to close your eyes for me please and I will lead you through a simple meditation. Take a deep breath – one, another one, another deep breath please. Thank you.

I was born at the edge of an exotic rainforest in Borneo, in a very dysfunctional and abusive family. My saving grace at that time was exposure to a tribe of the Dayaks, the natives of Sarawak. To me they represent the very essence of Humanity: living their lives expressly spiritually, and yet they did not know the word "spiritual" as we now call it.

I noticed that there was a sense of Joy with the Dayaks. That Joy allowed them to live in the forest simply. They were not encumbered by the excesses of our modern life nor worried about where to get money to pay for mortgages; there were no such things. And yet I was told, primarily by my mother, that the natives were different, they were less important than us. I said, "Why? Because they were not born according to any calendar, they had no houses and their skin was different?" I remember looking at them, trying to figure out what the difference was between them and me. I could see no difference; I thought there was something wrong with me; because they could speak like us, they could cry like us...

The natives were living joyfully; they were living with Joy. I use the word 'Joy' but not because it sounds good. Joy is the inner feeling; it's a 'feeling' word that comes when we feel alignment with the God inside us or with the spirit within us. Joy is like a tree that grows inside us; it gets stronger as our alignment to the spirit or to the divine or to God gets stronger.

When the government stepped in and took away the forest, the Dayaks had nowhere to go. They were asked to adopt a new way of life for which they were completely unprepared. The Dayaks were not aware they had that balance, that Joy. And that brings it back to me - when the forest was taken away from the Dayaks and they had nowhere to go, I found myself lost as well.

When I embarked on my spirituality over 20 years ago, I met a very powerful and kind woman who saw something in me. She told me I had a sense of redemption even though I was insufferable and miserable to be with. I told her I was trying to find my path to spirituality. She told me that spirituality starts with Love. I said, "How do you love someone whom you don't like?" Her answer, "Love is doing something that gives life or provides life to other people, enhances their dignity, their well-being."

I learned something through a prayer that says 'Seek to understand, not to be understood.' I always sought to be understood, "People must understand me or I feel offended. The forest was taken away. Poor me." Later on I realized that when I put myself aside and learn what Love is, I feel a presence of power. A power that we all can achieve when we put our thoughts aside and obtain the feeling of Peace within. That power or the feeling of Peace is what helps me take my photographs.

When I decided to take these images, I listened to the power that lead me to these people, "This is the person. Don't look at him because he is bad. Don't look at him because he is poor. Don't look at him because he is homeless. And don't look at him because he is rich. He is one of us. That is the Face of Humanity."

I also learned that in order to understand the sense of Humanity, I must learn to understand it through myself. I cannot understand it through anyone else. We all have failures, we all make mistakes. My challenge, however, is not to punish myself and not to feel guilty for what I have done; because I am learning. In the process of life we are bound to make mistakes.

When people ask me, "You must have thousands of pictures in your storage to display" I say, "No, I don't have thousands of pictures." I live my day moment by moment; because in that moment is what the Peace is all about. I do not look for the outcome. If I do, I always trip, without fail. Humanity is built moment by moment. The purpose of Humanity for me is to create a civilization, a culture, that is very peaceful and conducive to preserving our dignity.

When something is captured, an essence is captured in anything, like a portrait or a building, with Love, one always looks at it with a sense of satisfaction, a sense of Peace. When one sees that - that is Humanity captured.

That sense of Peace is very important to me. That is the most humble way I can share my life and my work through my portraits.

Thank you.