



Living a life of compassion

November 11, 2009 by natalamc

It all started with Darfur, well maybe it was before that, but Darfur sticks out, so I'll take it from there. Once upon a time, I was not an atheist, in fact I was in the very high up crowd at a couple of churches. The first Church we'll call "Church R". Church R was a really big place, tons of people, mostly one demographic, white, upper class and republican. There, the belief in the GOP seemed almost as important, if not more important to the belief of Jesus. I went along, really not questioning things, really not paying attention to a lot of things. I hailed Fox news as being a real news source, I recited lines from conservative talking heads, when it came to vegans, I made fun of them along with the rest of the crowd, I thought the entire idea of it was nonsense. Things started to change when I learned about the conflict in Darfur.

I remember talking to friends, and high up people of Church R and being told that I shouldn't concern myself with what was going on in Darfur, it was just the Devil, or it was just a 'muslim' conflict. I couldn't ignore it, it made my heart ache. I went to an interfaith worship service in Washington one weekend with a friend, I saw Muslims, Jews and Christians all sitting together, people I was told to look down on, people I was told I was in many ways better than. I started to see people differently, started to realize, that in the end, we all kind of believed the same thing - they read from their holy books, and for the first time I realized that we were all in the same boat, and we all wanted to do something about the conflict in Darfur.

It was soon after that I became really aware of what was going on in the Middle East, and the horrible war that we had waged. For the first time in my life I would participate in an anti-war protest. It was there, I saw people on the other side of the line - people who were screaming, shouting, calling muslims horrible names, people who attacked an anti-war mom and destroyed the memorial to her son who had died in the war, and I realized, that is who I once was, and the people who I once surrounded myself with.

It was around this time I found myself, through some really strange and bizarre circumstances, running a church - right - you read that correctly. Like all churches this one was also plagued with scandals, and illegal happenings. It was a more 'liberal' church, but that really didn't matter much, it was not immune to what the Church as a whole has become. I was a declared atheist during my time there (yes the leadership knew, but they had no one else). You might wonder why I stayed... I stayed because I was doing my own 'ministry' I became really close to those in the homeless community. These were the lowest of people to so many, they were on their last leg, and I loved them. I would hang out, have meals, and I befriended many of them. I was told by many that I was crazy - to not bother, to give up helping them, because they were drug addicts, or they wanted the life they had, but I couldn't do that.

While I was in the church, the one thing that I learned and held onto was this idea to "care for the least of these". Every time I got push back from my community about people I was trying to help or love, I remembered the words and held onto them. I wanted more than anything to live a life of compassion, speak for those who had no voice, love those who needed to be loved, put a face on those who society had ignored.

Fast forward a few years... When I went plant-based, little did I know that this idea of living a life of compassion would follow me, despite being an atheist, low and behold I still love, care, and have immense compassion for the least of these. This notion, was hard to ignore when I looked at animals. I remember reading a story of a man who was arrested for abusing his dogs, the story really struck me. I had heard stories of animal abuse before, and while it was sad, it never caused me to pause and think about it. Shortly after that I watched a video of a cow on an assembly belt, screaming and what I can only describe as crying as it was lead to be killed, to die a brutal, painful and horrifying death. I cried through the entire video, how was this not animal abuse? It was then I realized there was no difference in what the media perceives as animal abuse, and what happens in the factory farms - and slaughter houses every single day. No matter how you look at it, animals are hurt, abused, tortured and then killed brutally, and most don't seem to even flinch, because they don't have to witness it, they can just buy it in the fast food lane, and go on with their lives.

I quickly understood that living a life of compassion meant living a life where I care for and love the 'least of these', those who literally have no voice to speak with, no way to communicate the pain they are in. I started out going plant-based because I wanted to save myself, I wanted to live a long life with out disease. I am vegan, because of my desire to live a life of compassion and to care for the least of these.

There is so much hope in the animal world right now. Animal sanctuaries, a growing number of vegans, shelters that are humane, and awareness. I urge you to keep finding out as much as you can about animals, and what they go through for absolutely no reason. Volunteer at an Animal Sanctuary, read, watch movies, learn, and every day take steps to leading the most compassionate life that you can. No matter your religion, politics, ethnic background, living a life of compassion always wins in the end, and is something that you will never have to regret.

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6 Responses

Ann on November 11, 2009 at 9:54 pm | Reply

This is POWERFUL! As a Christian and a Vegan I really love what you wrote. I am a vegan because of the very same reasons! I believe that killing animals especially for greed and just because we can, is just wrong.

Thank you!



Mary on November 11, 2009 at 10:11 pm | Reply

I'm Christian and a vegan, that image of Jesus holding a lamb is the one I have thought of so many times in my vegan life. My ladies group at Church recently all decided to go on a plant based diet. We decided to really use what God gave us on the Earth, and not to abuse technology that allows us to eat whatever we want just because we can. The results health wise have been astonishing! It's such a simple concept.

I have friends in a lot of different faiths who are vegans for the same reasons, I don't know why I hadn't put the two together until a couple of years ago.



Jonathan on November 11, 2009 at 10:12 pm | Reply

Lovely post, very well said Natala.



Taylor on November 11, 2009 at 10:14 pm | Reply

The movie Earthlings changed every thing for me. It was very hard to watch, but it is the truth.



LEISEL on November 12, 2009 at 2:18 pm | Reply

Thank you for writing.

"True love of man is to know his pain and bear his sorrow." (Moshe Leib)

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Proverbs praises a man that cares for the needs of his animals.

Showing compassion is never wrong, whether directed toward our fellow man or toward animals.



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TWEETS

@Burnt_feet lol :) well, the preview is pretty cool ;) 53 minutes ago

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@Burnt_feet She is a raw food coach - I think ... :) How's life - and I like the new pic! 1 hour ago

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