

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

July 12, 2012

"Touchers"

What to Do About Them

I was sitting in the courtyard yesterday evening talking and joking around with some fellow prisoners when one of them - a notorious jokster who is always cracking jokes and never gets serious about anything - told me he wanted to ask me a serious question. He then proceeded to ask me if I had noticed a recent increase in the number of "touchers" in the prison population. "Toucher" was his euphemism for a person in prison for a sex crime, more specifically a sex crime against a child.

The issue of whether prisoners who are not in prison for a sex crime should treat those with sex crimes differently than others is something I have thought about quite a bit in the past. When I first came to prison I was of the opinion that they were scum that I should mistreat and punish at every opportunity. I felt it was my duty to make them suffer as they made their victims suffer. But I no longer feel that way.

Why should I help those who are oppressing me, oppress others? In my opinion, the entire criminal justice system in Wisconsin is nothing more than a tool of vengeance designed to harm the people caught in its grip. There is no justice or fair play. I have no respect for an arbitrary system that feeds off the misery of its prisoners. I will not lift one finger to make it harder on a fellow prisoner - no matter what he has done.

I took this stance long before I became a Christian but it dovetails nicely with my current beliefs. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay." In other words, God will do any "getting even" that is required. It's not my place to exact vengeance for another.

Additionally, most adults who molest children learned that behavior by being molested when they were children. They grew up and were unable to cope with the trauma of what happened to them so they ended up repeating the cycle of abuse. Some are able to heal themselves through treatment and no longer pose a threat to children. Others are unable or unwilling to benefit from treatment and end up incarcerated indefinitely under the predator law.

But getting back to the conversation, I asked him how he would know someone was a "toucher" and why it mattered if there were more or less of them in Stanley. I went on to explain my personal philosophy and point out that I had enough problems in my life to cope with without having to worry about what crimes had been committed by fellow prisoners. One of my favorite phrases is "that's not for me to worry about" and that's what I told him. Hopefully, he took it to heart.

So if anyone is going to exact vigilante justice in the Wisconsin prison system, they'll have to do it without me.

I should also point out that although persecuting people convicted of sex crimes occurs frequently in other prison systems, in Wisconsin the prisons are relatively safe for all prisoners. Gangs do not run rampant, rape is rare or nonexistent and to the prison officials' credit, they will lock down the entire prison system rather than cede control to the prisoners.