

July 22, 12 church talk

WHAT DISTINGUISHES OUR SERVICES HERE IS THE PRACTICE OF TAKING THE READINGS FROM THE LECTIONARY AND EXAMINING THEM, QUESTIONING THE MEANING AND INDIVIDUALLY INTERPRETING THEM.

WHEN HE SPOKE IN JUNE, BOB ASKED 'IS IT POSSIBLE THAT

ONLY BY CHRIST DO PEOPLE COME TO SPIRITUAL SALVATION MARY ASKED WHY A SINGLE, SEEMINGLY INNOCENT MAN, IS STRUCT DOWN BY GOD WHEN ALL HE IS TRYING TO DO IS KEEP THE SACRED ARC FROM FALLING .

THESE KINDS OF QUESTIONS ARE ALSO IN THE JEWISH TRADITION IN THE FORM OF MIDRASH, WHICH IS DEFINED AS 'TO INVESTIGATE OR STUDY – AN INTERPRETATION.

SO THE TRADITION OF QUESTIONING, INTERPRETING 'CHOOSING' IS PART OF THE WESTERN RELIGIOUS TRADITION.

SO TO SPEAK TO TODAY'S READINGS, MY THOUGHTS ARE INTERPRETATIONS – THAT ONE COULD AGREE WITH OR NOT.

WHAT ASTOUNDS ME EVERY TIME I AGREE TO SPEAK AND THEN READ THE LECTIONARY, IS HOW APT THESE BIBLE PASSAGES CAN BE. 2 SAMUEL IS THE STORY OF GOD INTSTRUCTING DAVID TO BUILD A

TEMPLE FOR THE ARC, WHICH HAS BEEN HOUSED IN TENTS UP UNTIL THIS TIME. DAVID IS TO BUILD A STRONG, FIXED HOME FOR THE ARC – IN OTHER WORDS BUILD A STRONG TRADITIONAL CHURCH. GOD SAYS, *'YOUR HOUSE AND YOUR KINGDOM SHALL BE MADE SURE FOREVER BEFORE ME; YOUR THRONE SHALL BE ESTABLISHED FOREVER.*

IN EPHESIANS, PAUL ANNOUNCES , THAT THE **NEW** CHURCH WILL UNITE BOTH GENTILES AND JEWS IN ONE CHURCH. PAUL SAYS, *HE HAS ABOLISHED THE LAW WITH ITS COMMANDMENTS AND ORDINANCES, THAT HE MIGHT CREATE IN HIMSELF ONE NEW HUMANITY IN PLACE OF THE TWO, THUS MAKING PEACE.*

THIS NEW CHURCH IS REPLACING THE OLD, TRADITIONAL CHURCH. IT IS MORE INCORPORATING – IT IS NOT OF **ONE** FAITH, THE JEWISH FAITH – BUT A CHURCH THAT IS MORE INCLUSIVE THAN THE TRADITIONAL CHURCHS.

1. THE REASON THIS SEEMS APT FOR US IN THIS CHURCH TODAY, IS THAT **WE** ARE NO LONGER A **TRADITIONAL** METHODIST CHURCH. WE HAVE BECOME A **COMMUNITY** CHURCH AS YOU ALL KNOW, THIS CHURCH HAS ALWAYS WELCOMED PEOPLE OF ALL FAITHS AND WE ARE STILL A CHURCH. BUT THERE IS A CHANGE.
2. ALONG WITH THE READINGS IN THE LEXIONARY ARE POSTED COMMENTS MADE BY PASTORS AND SCHOLARS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD) PASTOR *ARLAND J. HULTGREN*, , SAYS ABOUT THE PASSAGE IN EHPESIANS;
  - a. "We are all family, and no one is to be treated as

a stranger or alien. Differences in race, class, gender, economic condition, politics, and **opinion exist**, but they are not barriers to living in unity. The congregation is a **laboratory** for the kingdom of God."

I LIKE THE IDEA OF A CONGRGATION BEING A LABORATORY FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD – A PLACE WHERE DIFFERENCES EXIST BUT ARE NOT BARRIERS. IT ALSO GIVES US A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO EXCHANGE IDEAS ABOUT SPIRITUALITY.

WHY DO WE DO THIS? IN OTHER WORDS – WHY A CHURCH AT ALL? WHY HAS MANKIND – AND WOMAN KIND- BEEN DISCUSSING, SEARCHING, NEEDING SOME KIND OF SPIRITUAL LIFE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME AS WE KNOW IT?

PART OF THIS, I SUGGEST, IS THE POWER OF NATURE. I WILL USE THIS SUMMER HEAT AND DROUGHT AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW WE FEEL HELPLESS IN FACE OF THIS WEATHER AND YET, HOW WE INSTINCTLIVELY TRY TO AFFECT IT OR EVEN BLAME HUMAN ACTIVITY FOR IT.

MY GRANDDAUGHTER, ZELDA, WHEN SHE HEARD ME COMPLAINING ABOUT HOW DRY AND HOT IT

IS SAID "DO YOU THINK HAVING SEVEN VIRGINS JUMP INTO A FIRE WOULD MAKE IT RAIN?" SHE KNEW, OF COURSE, THIS WOULDN'T WORK, BUT SHE HAD READ OR SEEN SOMETHING ABOUT THIS.

CERTAINLY IN MANY CULTURES THROUGHOUT HISTORY THERE HAVE BEEN SACRIFICES AND CELEBRATIONS TO TRY AND AFFECT THE FORCE OF NATURE – IT IS A CONSTANT THEME IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. AND IN FACT LAST SATURDAY, AT THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINKEEPER BARN FEST THE SINGERS BETHANY AND RUFUS LED A CHANT AND PRAYER FOR RAIN – AND IT DID RAIN ON SUNDAY!

SO WE DO SEEK HELP IN THE FACE OF OVERWHELMING FORCES – I CAN'T HELP BUT MENTION THE TRAGEDY IN COLORADO. WE TRY TO FIND REASON – OR IF NOT REASON, EXPLANATION.

WE RECOGNIZE A POWER BEYOND HUMAN POWER. WE DON'T ALL AGREE ABOUT THIS POWER OR HOW IT HAS MANIFESTED ITSELF AND PERHAPS WE DON'T NEED TO, BUT THIS CHURCH HAS BECOME – AND I WOULD SAY FOR YEARS IT

WAS THIS WAY IN SPIRIT – A PLACE TO EXPLORE THE KINGDOM OF GOD – A PLACE THAT IS A LABORATORY – WHERE THERE IS DISCUSSION, DISAGREEMENT, QUESTIONS AND FREE EXCHANGE.

ANOTHER COMMENTATOR, Hyveth B. Williams, IN *The African American Lectionary*, SAID ABOUT THE EPHESIANS PASSAGE,

b. "This passage is cause for the people of God to rejoice that God is reconciling, healing and bridging communities in both the spiritual and natural world."

AND EACH ONE OF US –THOUGH A MEMBER OF THE SAME CONGREGATION HAS THE ABILITY TO CONSIDER AND CHOOSE WHAT WILL CONSTITUTE OUR BELIEF.

THERE IS ANOTHER COMMENT ABOUT THIS 'NEW CHURCH' IN EPHESIANS IN THE LECTIONARY THAT COMES FROM William Loader, Murdoch University, UNITED Church in Australia.

"It is not the mission to recruit strength and build power. It all depends so much on whether you see the goal as withdrawal to another source of power **beyond** all things or coming home to the source of love **within** all things which is seeking to bring and hold them together."

SO THIS SENSE OF HELPLESSNESS IN THE FACE OF NATURE, SOCIAL UPHEAVAL, THOSE THINGS WAY BEYOND OUR CONTROL, DOES NOT NEED TO SEPARATE US WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL HAVING OUR OWN EXCLUSIVE EXPLANATION FOR WHAT IS BEYOND US, BUT RATHER CAN BE 'COMING HOME TO THE SOURCE OF LOVE WITHIN ALL THINGS WHICH IS SEEKING TO BRING AND HOLD THEM TOGETHER.

THE READINGS TODAY ARE ALL AMAZING. THE GOSPEL READING TELLS OF TWO MIRACLES – THE BREAKING OF THE LOAVES AND FISHES AND JESUS WALKING ON THE WATER.

LIKE THE PASSAGES FROM SAMUEL AND EPHESIANS, THESE STORIES CAN BE INTREPRETED IN DIFFERENT WAYS, LITERALLY OR ALLEGORICALLY.

FOR INSTANCE, ONE INTERPRETATION OF BREAKING THE LOAVES AND FISHES IS THAT WHEN JESUS ENCOURAGED A FEW PEOPLE TO SHARE THEIR BREAD AND HE BEGAN TO DIVIDE IT, EVERYONE WHO HAD 'HIDDEN AWAY' THEIR LITTLE CACHE OF FOOD BROUGHT THEIRS OUT

TO SHARE. THIS, IN ITSELF IS A MIRACLE – THE MIRACLE OF SHARING AMONG STRANGERS.

IN THE STORY OF JESUS WALKING ON THE WATER, SOME SCHOLARS SAY THAT THE DISCIPLES WERE CONFUSED AND EXHAUSTED WHEN THEY SAW JESUS IN THE DARK STORMY NIGHT– BUT HE WAS ONLY WALKING IN THE SHALLOW WATER BY THE SHORE. HOWEVER, MOST AGREE THAT THE STORY IS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH – HOWEVER YOU INTERPRET IT.

AND OUR PSALM READING IS ONE OF MY FAVORITES; THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT. HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES’ HE LEADTHE ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS. HE RESTORETH MY SOUL;

IT IS THE REFERENCE TO NATURE THAT SETS THE SCENE AND MAKES THIS PSALM SO APPEALING. IT COULD BE ABOUT OUR OWN VALLEY. –

AND, REFERING BACK TO OUR NEED FOR STRENGTH DURING TIMES OF DURESS, THE PSALM IS COMFORTING – WE WILL BE TAKEN

CARE OF.

EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE  
VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH – I WILL  
FEAR NO EVIL; FOR THOU ART WITH ME;  
SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW  
ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE;

IT BRINGS US BACK AROUND TO THE  
  
BEGINNING OF THIS TALK----- WE STAND IN AWE  
OF NATURAL FORCES – BUT WE ALSO ARE A PART  
OF NATURE AND FOR MANY OF US  
COMMUNICATION WITH NATURE IS AN  
ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE – AND  
AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR MAKING SENSE OF  
OUR LIFE.

ALL THE READINGS TODAY ARE EMBLEMATIC  
OF THE RICHNESS WE FIND IN THE WRITTEN  
WORD. THAT IS A REASON THAT WE GATHER  
HERE IN THE CHURCH – TO FORM A  
CONGREGATION THAT IS A LABORATORY OF  
GOD.



IN

3. TRADITIONAL CHURCH/ NEW CHURCH
4. REFER TO MARY'S TALK ABOUT DAVID
5. HOW WE INTERPRET, WHY WE ARE CHERRY PICKERS
6. FACE AGAINST THE POWERS – BASICALLY OF NATURE
  - a. RAIN—RAIN DANCE, 7 VIRGINS, WOMAN AT BARNFEST, PETER'S DAUGHTER CHANTING, SINGING FOR RAIN, RED WOMEN DANCING FOR RAIN.
7. STORY OF TWO MIRACLES; LOAVES AND FISHES AND WALKING ON WATER – CAN BE INTERPRETED.
8. SO THAT'S WHAT WE DO – IT'S PART OF THE HUMAN CONDITION – WE ARE CREATURES OF FREE WILL, THE WILL AND FREEDOM TO CHOOSE
9. CREATING A CHURCH WHERE IDEAS ARE EXCHANGED, AND THERE IS FREEDOM TO DISCUSS, TO CONTEMPLATE AND TO CHOOSE
10. PERHAPS – DOXOLOGY – AND TIE BACK IN TO MOTHER EARTH.
11. [entary](#), Ephesians 2:11-22,
12. [Commentary](#)
13. ["First Thoughts on Year B Epistle Passages in the Lectionary,"](#) Pentecost 8,