

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, June 17, 2018

Are We Making the Lord Sorry? (Psalm 20 & 1 Samuel 15:34-16:1)



And the Lord was sorry
that he had made Saul king over Israel.
(1 Samuel 15:35b)

The story line of our passage/ text

God is sorry and Jesus weeps – God sees the suffering of his people and comes into the “grim fabric of life” (from the introduction to *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief*, a subordinate standard of The Presbyterian Church in Canada) to free us for contributing to the Commonwealth of God – for Canadian Presbyterians, the central affirmation of our faith is that God was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to himself - that’s the nature of the God we worship as Christians – considerate, compassionate, and comprehensive – a God who weeps in sorrow over what human beings are doing to rebel against God’s intent for the world

Provocative Points to Ponder

- At first glance, the passage from 1 Samuel that Rick read this morning is a tough text from which to preach – it witnesses to a God who is capable of being sorry for the leadership inflicted upon the people – that sensitivity on the part of God is a good thing – but the context of God’s sorrow here is horrible – essentially, God’s sorry because Saul did not follow his order to use violence to commit genocide – I can’t find it within myself to have any faith and trust in that kind of God – now, many in our world can – there are religious extremists on all sides of many of the conflicts that plague our world today who worship this kind of vengeful God – but they are tiny minorities within their religious traditions and do not represent the main emphases of those forms of faith
- this point was made powerfully by the Rev Dr George Sabra at our General Assembly this year, where I was a commissioner – president of the Near Eastern School of Theology in Beirut – prepares people for leadership in small Christian churches in the predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa – Sabra sees Christ calling us to participate in the dismantling of religious extremism, of the use of violence to impose a group’s view of absolute, uncontestable truth – we do so, in his context, by working together with Muslims for a better quality of human life on all levels, reflecting the gospel message of love and reconciliation, thus eliminating the causes of religious extremism – in concrete terms, for Sabra, this means supporting the full participation of women in Muslim societies, encouraging critical thought about the best ways to form human communities, and cultivating a society that respects pluralism – this is what following a God who invites us to grow into justice, kindness, and humility looks like for Sabra in the “grim fabric” of Middle Eastern life today
- let’s get beyond the specific order that Saul disobeyed – it’s not consistent with the will of God revealed in Jesus, the Christ – it’s not consistent with the teachings or the work of

Jesus in loving God, neighbour, and self – and when such inconsistencies arise in our reading of the Scriptures, according to Reformed wisdom in interpreting the Bible, we take God's living Word in Jesus Christ as our norm, made real for us by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in the community of the church – so, as I followed this principle of Biblical interpretation this week, I think what makes God sorry is our abuse of power

- It is not the victories of the weapons of extremist terrorism or even legitimated war that God grants, but the persistent pursuit of peace through justice and reconciliation – this is a God who is working out the reconciliation of the whole world to himself – this God is sorry for and weeps over any act that hinders the full realization of that mission
- The statue in our picture this morning stands across the street from the site of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 – an act of revenge committed by a Christian extremist group in the USA - 168 died – 680 injured - erected by the parish of St Joseph's Old Cathedral, itself heavily damaged in the bombing – this kind of vengeful misuse of power is what makes God sorry – and, sadly, there are far too many threads of this kind of thinking and acting woven into the “grim fabric” of our lives these days
- So, our witness in the face of this reality, is to a God who suffers with us and is sorry when such abuses of power take precedence over Jesus' summary of all the law and the prophets in the Great Commandment/Permission = love God with your whole being, and love your neighbour (the world) as yourself

Your Notes

Prayers of Thanks – for the love of fathers and father-figures in our lives who strive to align their parenting with the love of God revealed and prayed for so powerfully in Jesus Christ – fill our souls with your compassionate consideration of the best ways we can nourish souls to flourish in this spirit (silence to consider this)

Prayers for Help – for insight and strength in the face of partisan violence that divides and destroys – pray especially that you will bring clarity and compassion about your purposes in the complex extremism of hatred and violence that consume so many groups these days (silence to consider this)

Prayers for Awe – at the surprising ways your love surrounds us and sustains us, often unnoticed – especially for the urges through which you invite us to come along side all of those fighting against a vengeful hatred in the “grim fabric” of our lives (silence to consider this)