

Sermon: August 16, 2009

Old Testament Lesson: I Kings 2:10-12

New Testament Lesson: Ephesians 5:15-20

Title: Making It Through the Evil Days

One of the principles of Biblical Theology is that God created everything that we humans understand as the World and the Heavens and the Firmaments of the heavens. If it is out there, God brought it into existence; God ordered it; God organized it, and God gave it purpose. In the first chapter of Genesis, throughout the first story of creation (our scriptures give us two), God's Creative force was called Good.

Thirteen times in the first chapter of Genesis it is declared: And it was good.

Now the antithesis of "good" is "evil".

It did not take long for human beings to discover that not everything is good. Indeed, that there is much evil in the world. God, being a good and just Deity could not be the author of evil. It is not in God's nature. Our reformed theology, passed down from Calvin to Knox and then to the Scots Presbyterian Church and thence to the new world held in the catechism that God is not the author of evil.

Still, no one can deny that evil exists. The opposite of everything that the God of Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachael, Moses and _____ stood for is found in our midst. Murder and mayhem. Greed and Avarice; Lying, cheating and stealing to name a few. Why? How?

The authors of the Hebrew Tradition formed their understanding through the use of the story of Adam and Eve. Now, I'm not going to argue as to the literal truth or the allegorical truth of the story of Adam and Eve. My faith is founded on the Truth (Capital T) of this creation story. That truth is quite simple,

While God created it all, there was a force in the world that is directly counter to everything that God stands for.... Call this force "evil", the devil, a snake, Satan, antichrist, you can probably think of other names for this force. So, the authors of the scriptures established very early in the narrative that God was going to have a difficult time with this human race that God created. If nothing else, the story of Adam and Eve ought to convince us that we are a people who are easily led astray. It did not take a lot of sweet talking from the serpent to turn Adam and Eve around. So, we have another truth from the scriptures: evil is that force or power which would disrupt,

oppose and contradict everything good and perfect which God has established. We Humans become the battleground for this constant struggle between Good and Evil.

Most of the scriptures are a chronicle of how this battle shapes up in the lives of God's people. Sometimes the stories are beautiful depictions of God's Grace and love. Take the story of Ruth and Naomi. And sometimes the stories are not so pretty, take the story from last Sunday's sermon about Absalom. There are times when God's people triumph and great things are done for God, and there are stories when God's people violate almost every precept that has been laid down for them. This swing of the pendulum has continued for almost 5000 years. Sometimes we are good and sometimes we are evil. The human animal, unlike most of the other animals which God created, can twist and turn in so many directions that God must be sitting on his throne asking himself, "Why did I create such creatures?" But God knows why we were created: "to worship God and enjoy God forever." According to the Westminster Catechism.

Are we more evil today than in the time of Calvin? Are we more evil today than in the time of Paul?

Are we more evil today than during the lifetime of Christ? Are we more evil than in the early years of the Kingship of Solomon?

You and I live in a time that is constantly aware of the evil that exists around us. Calvin did not have an e-mail address, nor a cell phone, or TV or I-pod. Calvin knew of the evil that existed in Geneva and to some extent throughout Europe. But news of the execution of seven of his students in Paris for preaching the new Reformed Gospel did not reach his ears for three months. When the Muslim hords swept across Albania in 1901, and over 2 million Christians were executed for their faith, news did not reach American shores for six months and even then it was difficult to document the deaths. There were no reporters imbedded with the troops in Albania. You and I wake up every day to headlines that are designed to gain our attention and keep us coming back for more. Good news doesn't sell.

Elaine was telling me about Wednesday's Ophra Show. She spent two hours highlighting some of the good things that people are doing for others in this economic crunch. She told of a woman who went to a foreclosure auction. She saw a woman weeping and discovered that she was losing her house because she was \$3000. Behind in payments. Immediately she went out and purchased the house and gave it to the woman, then she set up a non-profit organization to do the same thing for others who are losing their house, sometimes for as little as \$600 in back taxes. Ophra interviewed a man who gets used cars, fixes them up and sells them cheap to folks who have no transportation to work. A NASCAR racing team has gotten on board with him

and they are helping folks who want to work, but have no way to get to and fro by giving them dependable automobiles. And the man does all the repair work for free.

We do not hear about these kinds of things on TV enough or in the Newspapers.

We certainly live in a world that is filled with evil. But there is so much good going on, and it is our job as followers of Jesus Christ to partner with the Good and become conduits of this good.

This brings me to our first scripture for the morning. Good old Solomon. I suspect that while most of us did not know who his brother Absalom was, we do know who Solomon was. King after David. Architect of the great temple in Jerusalem. Maintainer of Peace throughout the Land. We think of the way that Solomon brought to Jerusalem the riches of the known world. Myths exist about King Solomon's mines in the deepest of Africa. But our story is fundamental to the nature of Solomon. First in the second chapter of I Kings we are told that King David "rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David." We are also told that Solomon sat on the throne and his kingdom was firmly established.

However, in the third chapter we are given a little more insight into Solomon's character. In a dream Solomon hears God speaking: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Now, I don't know about you, but if God spoke to me in a dream and offered me the opportunity, I'd be making a list. And it wouldn't look like a Christmas list for Santa Clause. It would look more like a wish list from the Pentagon, the National Parks Service, the National Center of Health and NASSA.

Not so with Solomon. We all know what he asked for. Not things! But for wisdom. Specifically:

Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.

A discerning heart to govern and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. In a world that was teeming with injustice and crime, war and hate, filth and bitterness, where horrible atrocities took place on a daily basis, Solomon asks for discernment and the knowledge of right and wrong.

My friends in Christ, we are in a war. You and I are living in a battle zone. It is not like any war that our nation has ever fought. This war would be so much easier if there were hostile troops invading our shores. But that is not the war we are in. We are in a war of ideology. And the combatants are not troops from hostile nations. We are the troops. Like the two women who brought the baby who lived to Solomon and each claimed him, we claim truth on all sorts of questions we are facing in this nation.

Should assault weapons be available to anybody who wants one?

Should the Federal Government limit access to birth control information for teens?

Should the Federal Government continue price supports to mega farmers who produce so much corn that third world farmers cannot compete in the open market place?

Should we revamp our tax laws so that everyone, rich and poor, pays a fair and equitable tax?

How can we restructure our educational system so that every child gets an opportunity to learn the skills that will lead to a healthy and productive life.

What can we do in this, the richest nation in the world, to assure that all our citizens receive fair and affordable health care?

If you do not think we are in a battle, then you have not watched some of the town meetings that have taken place around this country. I kid you not, I watched one man so hostile that if he had had a gun I am sure he would have shot the Senator who was trying to explain the elements of a proposed health care law. And the flames of these wars are being whipped by special interests who do not have the total population of this nation in their best interests. When a reporter goes on national television and tells folks that the Health Care Bill will tell the elderly when they should die, and that there will be a National panel to decide at what age you had to die. Then I know we are truly at war.

Folks, we need the very thing that Solomon asked of God: a discerning heart and the ability to know the difference between good and evil.

Let me just stay with the Health Care Issue for a moment. I have read small sections of the proposed legislation. And after the Senate gets finished with it, it may not even look like the same bill that the representatives sent over to them. But this I do know. We cannot allow ourselves to be drawn into a battle if we do not know what we are talking about, if we have not studied the elements of any proposal, if we have not spent some time discerning what it means not just to me, but to millions of others who have no

coverage, who have to choose some months between eating or renewing their heart medicine.

Like Solomon we need to study the differences between good and evil with regard to our national health care policy, and then we need to speak out and support that which brings the greatest good to the greatest numbers of people. Christianity is not a “me first” religion. The teaching of Christ have always called us to give up our self-centered points of view and focus on the needs of others.

Are we going to allow this battle over health care to destroy all civil discourse. Or, perhaps we will once again choose up sides and repeat the civil war, in the name of what..... my fears Your fears... my misunderstandings..... your misunderstanding.

As soon as a finished copy of a proposed bill is ready, it will be my intention to get a copy. It is my hope that some of us will want to enter into a civil discussion about the provisions of the bill, so that we can diffuse the hatred and bitterness that special interests have generated in this nation. That’s what we can do as Christians..... learn the truth... the good and evil of a subject and discern with an open heart where the truth lies.

I challenge you this morning, not as Democrats, Republicans or Independents, but as Disciples of Jesus Christ to join me in this attempt to diffuse the hostility. The Prince of Peace calls us to discern the truth, for the truth will make us free.

Finally, brothers and sisters, I lay before you these words from Paul. Paul who had worked both sides of the street when it came to good and evil. He begs his Christian brothers and sisters in Ephesus:

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of God is..... giving thanks to God the father at all times and for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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