

**The Palisades Presbyterian Church
Palisades, New York**

Sixth Sunday in Regular Time
February 11, 2007

1 st Readings	Jeremiah 17: 5 - 10
Anthem	<i>Canticle of Praise</i> Lloyd Larson, Composer
2 nd Reading	The Gospel of Luke 6:17 - 26
Hymn #106	<i>Alleluia! Alleluia! Give Thanks</i>
Hymn #518	<i>Una Espiga/Sheaves of Summer</i>
Hymn #386	<i>O For a World</i>

Reflection

Jesus said love one another. He didn't say love the whole world.

-Mother Teresa

All of me, why not take all of me?
© 2007 Ray Bagnuolo

Can't you see I'm no good without you?

If you took the title of this morning's sermon, of sorts, and remembered the next line, you would understand what I just said:

All of me, why not take all of me, can't you see, I'm not good without you...

If the song were sung in Jeremiah's time (the 7th century BCE), it might have been rephrased by him to something like –

All of God, why not take all of God? Can't you see you're no good without you...

And Jeremiah, made no bones about it. Even the most casual readings about Jeremiah are sure to capture your attention and, yes, even some admiration.

He was a courageous prophet – in many ways: willing to speak up to kings, identified the Babylonians as agents of God to whom the Judeans should submit themselves rather than war with Egypt and others, and even clearly state that the

Temple was not necessary for worship. Moral living – that was what concerned him the most, and he was clear that good moral living was something that the individual needed to do and that it could be established without adhering to the confining directives and practices of the Deuteronomists, who found their capital surging during the time of Josiah's Reform. It was a time that, among other things, tried to centralize worship (and the subsequent commerce of worship) around the temple.

That's not to suggest that Josiah's reforms, which began following the finding of the scroll of Deuteronomy in the wall of the temple during its renovation under King Josiah – that's not to suggest that the motivation for the reforms was wholly economic or political. Jeremiah was in favor of some of the reforms in an attempt to turn back the wrong headedness of the times, but I imagine that even he was a little suspicious of the discovery of the scroll, which put King Josiah on the map – out of the blue. It is a suspicion that is shared today by many biblical scholars, some going so far as to wonder if, in fact, Josiah didn't plant the scroll himself, to later be found by workers. Intrigue, indeed!

Either way, Jeremiah saw the need for reform, but unlike many other prophets, his was a much more personalized calling as a prophet. He was not against the economy or even the politics of the time. He and everyone else participated in the times in which they lived; times that included incredible upheavals and strife both domestically and internationally. And Jeremiah through a succession of kings, trials, and exhortations – was right in the middle of it.

At his core, though, I think he would have found some resonance with recent answers given in an interview by Wendell Berry. It can be found in the August 2006 online issue of *Counterpunch.com*. In an article called *Taking Care of What We Have Been Given*, Berry was asked the following by the interviewer:

Interviewer:

In your essay "Compromise, Hell!" you write, "If we believe, as so many of us profess to do, that the Earth is God's property and is full of God's glory, how can we do harm to any part of it?" And in several other essays you ask, "How do we create an economy that makes love an economic practice?"

Wendell Berry:

That's right. I've developed that idea most painstakingly in the essay "The Burden of the Gospels." If you take love as the prescribed way of life, how do you make that an economic practice? That's the crisis question. A lot of people who accept that gospel of love don't think of economic practice as having any religious significance at all.

It may be that most of challenges are based on or along these same lines. Substitute the word economy and try again:

- If you take love as the prescribed way of life, how do you make that a social practice? That's the crisis question. A lot of people who accept that gospel of love don't think of social change as having any religious significance at all.
- If you take love as the prescribed way of life, how do you make that a political practice? That's the crisis question. A lot of people who accept that gospel of love don't think of political practice as having any religious significance at all.
- If you take love as the prescribed way of life, how do you make that an educational practice? That's the crisis question. A lot of people who accept that gospel of love don't think of educational policies as having any religious significance at all.
- If you take love as the prescribed way of life, how do you make that a *wealth* practice? That's the crisis question. A lot of people who accept that gospel of love don't think of wealth or abundance as having any religious significance at all.
- If you take love as the prescribed way of life, how do you make that a *world peace* practice? That's the crisis question. A lot of people who accept that gospel of love don't think of world peace as having any religious significance at all.

I probably would replace the word religion with spirituality, but that is more of my own bias than anything else. Berry doesn't separate the idea of spirituality and religion, stating: "I don't like that dichotomy of matter and spirit very much, so you can say I consider myself a religious man." [rather than a spiritual person]

However, calling oneself religious in this regard does not necessary invite a synchronicity with dogma. Stretching it a bit, I think Berry would find much in common with Jeremiah's predisposition toward "Temples without walls," and an individual heart and relationship with God.

And on repentance... It's one of those words that was used so often to beat me up that I almost resist writing it, let alone speaking it.

But -- Jeremiah's language of repentance -- really - is that much different from some of our own demands on society and church of these post-modern times?

Aren't we regularly calling for change and, I guess a "repentance" from our ways?

Actually, sometimes, it seems that so many are calling for such things from so many different points of views that it becomes very difficult to know what to repent from or to! Which is why, on occasion, I just duck!

And I think that is the point of Jeremiah and Berry and Jesus. It's to stop and get back to the basics – the origin – the God we know.

I am not one of those who thinks that God is testing or punishing us with natural or other disasters. Truth be told, I would have a great deal of trouble with that kind of a God. But, there are consequences for our actions and we do need to address the conditions of our lives and broader society. For people of faith, Christians and other – that means following certain teachings of the faith. It seems that when we veer too far away from those teachings or twist them into inescapable circular and divisive arguments – that things, sometimes in a big way, go awry.

In this morning's *Sermon on the Plain*, a parallel version to Matthew's *Sermon on the Mount*, Luke recalls Jesus' teachings; teachings I think that are calling for just such repentance – a return to the fundamentals of God's *hesed*, as referred to in Jeremiah, that is: steadfast love. It is a call to enter into that love in all ways, with all our body, mind, and spirit – in all our practices and dealings with one another.

In your handout

<i>The Beatitudes</i>	
Matthew: Sermon on the Mount Matthew Chapter 5	Luke: Sermon on the Plain Luke Chapter 6
Spiritual and Moral Character of those who will enter the kingdom of heaven	More primitive?
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.	Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.	Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your	Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for

reward is in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.	joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth	
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy	
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God	
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God	
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	

<i>The Woes</i>	
Matthew	Luke
	But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Immediately following these verses, we have Jesus' teaching on The Laws of Love and Mercy. This is a teaching time for Jesus, an important time. Through Luke, we are given Jesus' prescription for living and living through difficult times.

From Matthew we get a slight variation, an interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, in which he is writing much more about the spiritual nature of the beatitudes and the moral character which will identify those who get into heaven.

Luke has Jesus present in the real world –

- I know you are hungry, and I know you see so many around you with full tables and food. Trust me, you will be fed one day, even though you are so hungry now.
- I see how poor you are and I know how hard it is to be so poor and to see so many around you with multiples of wealth in every way of constructing such totals. Please, believe me, you are no less valuable to God because of your poverty. God loves you, regardless of your wealth and you will be rewarded in heaven.
- And on sorrow – trust me, you will laugh.

Remember to whom it is Jesus says he has been called to serve. Remember the reading in the temple:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18)

Think of the times....

Jesus was preaching to the masses who had come to him to be healed, to listen, to be part of a happening – huge revivals, festivals – in some ways, that followed him. The poor, the disenfranchised, and others who heard him and knew, believed, felt in the Eastern heart of theirs that this was the One.

And Jesus had great compassion as he grew in his ministry, eventually demonstrating the greatest compassion of all. So it is no wonder that he was ticked when he saw the ragged, poor, and ill – discarded, invisibilized by the wealthy and the comfortable and the systems that ignored them, while using them for its own purposes – human fuel, if you will.

That is much different than what some suggest that Jesus comes from a position of demonizing wealth, which he never did. He was challenging those for whom wealth and for whom human things had taken on more importance than the spiritual things – sound familiar to Jeremiah?

When Jesus told the young ruler to go and sell everything he had to enter the kingdom of heaven, it had nothing to do with the young man's wealth, per se. It had to do with the fact that his wealth had blocked him from growing spiritually. It wasn't the wealth; it was – if it gets in your way of serving others, of losing sight of God – it would be best to lose it...fasssst!

Jesus relied on the support and benefit of others, some of his disciples were folk of significant means, many of them woman, and they financed his ministry. Without them there's a chance the voice in the wilderness might never have been heard. There is a message in this we need to listen to.

But, as appropriately as wealth has and can be used, it must have peeved Jesus to no end, to a fractured angry state to see the proud and privileged and patronizing – treat his beloved, God's creation as less than or trash. Jesus had a bit of Jeremiah in him, I think. And, I think he knew it – and he used it.

And we have to keep in mind that Jesus, Jesus – never left that small parish of his – he worked locally and let the Spirit do the rest.

All of me. I really do ask God to take all of me and use me as God wishes each day. That means, too, that I pray to not to get so overwhelmed by all that needs to be done that I just give up and slip into my own comfort to assuage my bruised ego.

Nor do I try to do everything – and slip into physical, emotional, and spiritual distress.

There's enough to do living in this world without being responsible for all of it!

Instead, it's the all of me that I can be in the balance of what I can do, and serve, and how I can work with others. It's the balance that Jeremiah called for in our relationship first with God and with others; it's the balance that Jesus called for – first in doing for the least among us; it's the balance of Wendell Berry in the “burden of the gospel,” applying it in all our dealings, and it's Mother Teresa.

Seeing so much that needs to be done and becoming frozen in not knowing what to do next or constantly belittling what I do do, since it seems to have such little impact. It's a sense that can lead one out...

And then I come across a quote from Mother Teresa that reminds me, again, what I have learned about beginning where your feet are...

Love one another, one at a time starting from here...take all of me, as I am: here and now....

Leave the rest in God's hands, for our part is in order. Amen.