

Palisades Presbyterian Church
September 9, 2007

In for a Penny; In for a Pound
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This morning's texts are not the easiest.

Probably one of the most difficult of things for ministers to do is to come to this place and read lectionary readings about a God that breaks and remolds nations and a Jesus who tells us that it's necessary to hate one's parents to follow him parents.

Here we are, talking about love and compassion and embracing God, and the readings seem to be filled with, well, something opposite of those.

Let's take a look at the texts for a minute:

The First Testament reading this morning clearly puts the clay in God's hands, once more with the fearful, vengeful, somewhat unpredictable God of the early writings – promising punishment and destruction if the ancient Jews did not behave.

No one could get that message across better than Jeremiah, and as we have learned from our study over the last few weeks – the times in which Jeremiah proselytized were times in which chaos, disappointment, and unpredictability were a way of life with invasions, destruction, and captivity. Everything was seen as scripted by God and such events could only be seen as punishment for improper behavior.

Today, we generally don't live in fear of God, instead - in many ways I think we try to *understand* God, not fear God. Sometimes, often, that means asking ourselves questions of theodicy, such as how God could let such things happen:

- 9/11 which we remember this week;
- losses and suffering in our families,
- people who are homeless and poor living on the streets in the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world.
- Add more to the list...there is much more and the sum total of our hearts becomes a mighty question indeed

But fear of God, not quite like the Old or First Testament. It all changed with Jesus, had you noticed?

The Second Testament and the teachings of Jesus move us beyond the vengeful punishing God to a God that calls us to discipleship: recall the two greatest commandments:

Mathew 22: 36 – 40

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied:
" 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

The fire and brimstone is redirected in a call to servant hood based on our love of God, as we know God, first -- and becoming the conduit of that love to our neighbors. It is, in my mind, like the cross upon which Jesus died: the bridge from the First Testament into the Second Testament, the Old into the New, led by the ultimate sacrifice of the one from Nazareth to show the way – and promising us: it wouldn't be easy.

And, this morning, we heard another prophet with the same message of servant hood and discipleship. Dale reminded us, regardless of our traditions – but certainly because of the one we observe here – that we have a responsibility to serve our sisters and brothers who are poor and homeless with the same energy and love with which we serve each other. He might have said that what we need to do is to think a little less of ourselves and a little more of those who need our help.

For me, that's a pretty good description of what a minute for mission actually is: a time to redirect our thinking from ourselves to others and our actions in the same direction.

In biblical Semitic times, we might very well have used the word “miseo” – Greek for “hate” in this way to describe a similar situation:

We need to hate ourselves a bit more and love others with a greater intensity. It is broadly understood that Jesus' use of the word “miseo” in its Aramaic form would have meant: to love less, in terms of being a true disciple: you will need to love your parents, your home, your friends less than you love me – if you are to follow the road I will follow.

Some say that these words of Jesus were spoken to thin out the mobs and circus atmosphere that were building around him. A throng made up of those who followed him and were unconditionally willing to give of themselves based on what he was teaching – as well as others who were traveling along for their own self gain, hoping to make a buck, to be part of the party, or hoping to find a place of power at the end of the road.

Whatever the reasons, it would have been clear to the audience what he meant when he used the word miseo or its variants: discipleship would cost you: big time.

Mathew has a parallel version of the same reading in which he states it less harshly than Luke:

The parallel account of this message is given in Matthew 10.37:

"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

There is trouble with ancient texts and translations. Ancient words translate differently and when the KJV was written, this translation of *miseo* was unfortunate – so we learn.

And again we are taught. Taught and reminded that we can't always think of just ourselves. At times, we have to think more of others than we do of ourselves. And, sometimes, when you do – be prepared for some to disagree with you – if only because your actions will be challenging to them.

That doesn't seem to happen here though. We don't shun the servant hood and the inherent risks of being a disciple, instead we seem to keep trying to learn how to better serve, even when we are less than perfect at such attempts.

At a Session meeting in June, I asked our Session if they would support a motion to the Presbytery for sending an overture to the General Assembly for the deletion of G-6.0106b in our Book of Order. As many of you know, this is the Amendment that is often used to exclude LGBT folk from serving in the church. Our presbytery has often concurred with overtures approved by other presbyteries – but never actually initiated one for this purpose.

You have a letter and the motion in your hands which will help you to understand what this all means if you are unfamiliar with it, so I will leave that to you to read and invite you to a talk back next Sunday on this or anything else on your mind, as we begin this new church year.

Back to June's meeting: When I asked the Session the question about supporting an overture, one of the members said, "Well, in for a penny in for a pound!" In other words, we are committed not just to saying that we were a More Light Church; committed not just to calling the most qualified to serve us regardless of sexual identity; but committed as well to a changed and welcoming church in the hopes that such a thing would change a world." What a Session!

There are not idle words. The actions we have taken here in all forms of mission have invited us to think less of ourselves and more of others. In the hopes of guiding the Presbytery into a leadership role at the next General Assembly, we have taken leadership in prompting the presbytery and the greater church with a powerful reminder that we still have work to do and that we, and others, are willing to take action.

As we begin our new church year, we stand here in the center of local and national calls to discipleship, and the Palisades Presbyterian Church like so many others has many opportunities for us to "hate our comfort" so that we can love others a bit more. We continue to walk the walk and invite you all to join in whatever way you can. In the weeks ahead we will be highlighting all the ways you can serve, in case you were

wondering! In the meantime, feel free to contact any of the committee members and chairs listed in your announcements.

Again, I want to thank Dale for being with us and helping to set the tone for us in concrete ways in which we can share ourselves and our blessings with others.

In for a penny? Absolutely. IN for a pound – priceless.