

Sermon for Sunday, October 6, 2019

### GODLY GLOBALIZATION

I learned that the world out there is bigger than my own small life when I was just a little girl. My pastor father always made a BIG deal out of World Communion Sunday – marveling with the congregation that on that day every single Christian in the world was sharing communion together. And so, early on I began to imagine children in China and Brazil and South Africa and New Zealand, sitting right next to me, eating with me and singing with me. And I have been in love with this annual global feast ever since.

As we gather around our multi-cultural table this morning, I carry in my heart memories of breaking bread and sharing the cup all over the world – 40 years ago in Quito, Ecuador with children and chickens running around the communion table – 25 years ago in Beit Sahour on the West Bank of Palestine – where old women carried baskets of fresh bread forward for the feast – and then marched out into the streets to share their bread with the poor – 15 years ago in western Ethiopia where brightly clad women sang and danced down the aisle to offer their gifts of bread and wine to God.

It is images of people from all over the world that I see when I hear the words of our scripture lesson for today – the great vision of Revelation at the end of time – the God drenched vision of shalom - a great multitude singing and praising and marching before God – from every nation, from all the tribes and peoples and languages. This New Testament vision re-imagines Isaiah's dream of the messianic banquet – that glorious time when all will be one, when all will be brothers and sisters, when all will eat together at the abundant feast of life – yes, that comforting moment when God will wipe away every tear from human eyes.

But, let us not forget that in the vision of Revelation, the multitude are also the ones who have come out of the great ordeal – out of the great tribulation - out of the real pain and suffering and brokenness of life. And we are reminded that God's promise does not protect us from struggle. Instead God's great promise empowers us to endure in the midst of struggle, because God is with us – because God's great love never abandons us. And so, this World Communion Day, I think of other images - images of tribulation, images of great ordeals, images of our broken, beautiful world today.

- 32 lifeless bodies in El Paso, Texas – most of them Latinos – victims of a hate crime and America's obsession with guns;
- coastal and island populations in Puerto Rico and Miami, Houston and the Bahamas – most of them the poorest of the poor - wiped out by hurricanes linked directly to global warming;
- hungry families in St. Louis, where according to 2018 statistics, 40% of children under the age of 11 live below the poverty line.

My friends, God is as present in these troubling images as in the happy parades and feasts of hope.

Madeline Albright once served on a panel with Elie Wiesel, the great writer and Holocaust survivor. Wiesel asked the panelists to name the unhappiest character in the Bible. Some said Job, because of all his trials. Others said Moses, because he never did reach the Promised Land, others Mary because she witnessed the excruciating death of her son. Wiesel disagreed with all these choices. He thought that God was the unhappiest biblical character because of the pain God

must feel in seeing all God's children fight, abuse and kill each other, often in God's name.  
(quoted in *Context* in June.)

Thirty-five years ago our Presbyterian denomination gave us a vision for how we can live faithfully and hopefully in this in between time – this time between the tribulations and ordeals of the present, and the promised wholeness of God's future. Our General Assembly decided that Peacemaking is the Believer's Calling. Peacemaking is the main vocation of our daily lives - a perspective, an attitude, a way of living that can help bring about peace – one person, one day, one congregation at a time.

Peace of course does not just mean serenity, or lack of conflict. The biblical word for peace is shalom – and it means justice and wholeness and dignity for all God's children. And sometimes facing injustice and changing injustice can feel very un-peaceful. But Jesus is pretty clear. As one of my friends once said, "Jesus doesn't say to us "believe ideas about me." Instead Jesus says," Come, follow me, feed my sheep, turn the other cheek, love your enemies, go out into the world, preach good news to the poor, set the oppressed free, blessed are the peacemakers for you will be called the children of God."(adapted from a presentation made by Nancy Kahaian, Chair of the General Assembly Council, September 28, 2005)

Peacemaking as a calling – peacemaking as a vocation - peacemaking as a way of life. What does it mean? And how do we do it – collectively and individually? As I continue to try to tame the violent and vengeful tendencies that still whisper in my very human soul, I have discovered that

peacemaking begins with repentance – with taking the log out of my own eye, before I worry about the speck in my enemy's eye.

John Lewis, the esteemed congressman from Georgia, tells of the day he was imprisoned in the 1960's and forced to stand naked for hours, guarded by deputies with cattle prods. And what was his crime as a young black man in America? He was simply trying to ride a Greyhound bus. The history of racial animus and discrimination in this country is a legacy we all share, and a burden we all still carry. But it is when we remember and admit our part in the ordeals of our culture, that peacemaking becomes easier. And the healing can begin.

And, we soon learn that because suffering is universal, suffering is also a call to human solidarity – that when it comes to personal or communal suffering, there are no cultural differences. If you remember, on 9/11, over thirty nations were represented among the victims of the Trade Towers tragedy - Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhist, Hindus - black, yellow, white, beige, red. The Global God who is Creator of us all, weeps when anyone of us, anywhere in the world, suffers. And this Global God expects us to do the same.

Our wonderful Anne Peacock has been working on our Bread Fellowship meal for weeks, imagining breads from 50 countries, creating bouquets of global grains and grasses, getting up in the middle of the night to try one more unusual recipe. In a blog Anne wrote a few years ago, she included this quote from Peter Reinhart:

*The history of the natural world is contained in a slice of bread...[where]grace is abundantly evident. How bread works is how life works...life is reflected in bread and life is resurrected in bread. This is not only a Christian principle; it is a universal principle reflected in every culture, tradition, and major religion. When the individual ingredients die to the whole, something new emerges.*

And so it is with us. When individual egos and countries die and rise to a vision of global wholeness, something new emerges.

One of the buzz words in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world is “globalization” – a political and economic ideal that has caused great conflict, as well as great possibility. But as this word appears in the news reports, we know that much of the globalization movement is about consumerism and economic opportunity – about engaging with poorer countries to create lower labor costs, so that goods in this country can be cheaper. Of course, such economic development in the two-thirds world can and does increase the standard of living in those countries – but at what cost to values and cultures different from ours? Do we really want the whole world to wear blue jeans and drink coke, while uneducated teenagers work 10 hours a day, for pennies on the dollar, producing our clothing?

I would like to suggest that globalization from a biblical and theological perspective, means something very different. Godly globalization is not about profit, but about promise. It is not about economic wealth; it is about spiritual wealth. It is not about connecting corporations, but about connecting communities and people around the world – woven together by the universal love of God. And, the purpose of Godly globalization is to build a table big enough to hold the entire human family – a big round table where everyone is equal – a table that offers food for the journey toward peace – a table that joyfully embodies God’s dream of shalom.

There is a Hasidic tale that speaks to the vision of this day:

*An old rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun.*

*“Could it be,” asked one of the students, “when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it’s a sheep or a dog?”*

*“No,” answered the Rabbi.*

*Another asked, “Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and can tell whether it’s a fig tree or a peach tree?”*

*“No,” answered the Rabbi.*

*“Then what is it?” the pupils demanded.*

*Day is when you can look on the face of any man or woman and see that it is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night.”*

My friends this is the feast of God for the children of God - all the children of the world. And it is served in the blinding daylight of God’s grace. Let us come and be fed by the holy and healing hospitality of God.

May it be so, for you and for me. Amen

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