

Metho-huh? Week 8: Vision for the World

Scripture

Isaiah 1:12-17

When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation— I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Luke 4: 16-30

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Questions

- 1.) In the Luke passage, Jesus presents himself as quite radical, though consistent with Old Testament scripture. It enraged the people in his home town so much they were about to throw him off a cliff. As those who follow Jesus, what might this imply for us? Did Jesus lack diplomacy?

- 2.) John Wesley was 86 years old when he was visiting the people called Methodists in Dublin, Ireland on July 2, 1789. He was considered successful and famous all throughout the British Isles, and Methodism was becoming the largest congregation in America. Yet Wesley was extremely dissatisfied and pondered Jeremiah 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?" Poverty still existed in a generational cycle. Injustice was still happening. The goal of our faith is to move towards abolishing injustice. It is obvious this still exists today. Check your reaction, and don't be too harsh on yourself. Do you feel angry? Complacent? Confused? Overwhelmed? Energized?

- 3.) Wesley felt that the determining factor that Christians were being fully formed in Christian faith was if the world had less injustice and poverty. Pastor Sandy said that :
1.) God has a vision; 2.) this vision disrupts the status quo; and 3.) We have the choice to participate in the radical vision of God's new world. What gets in the way of Christians working to end oppression? Why does God trust us with this invitation?

- 4.) Walter Brueggemann wrote in "Journey to the Common Good" of the differences between Old Testament economy and capitalist economy. In our capitalist economy, we live under the idea of scarcity. The only way to keep it going is by consuming more. In the Old Testament economy, every good thing is a gift from God and therefore the people live in an abundant mindset. This led to regular periodic debt forgiveness, especially the year of Jubilee. This must've been dear to Wesley's heart as his own father was in debtor's prison for awhile while the huge Wesley clan struggled to survive. John Wesley later opened interest free banks in Bristol and London. How is debt an oppressive force? How does it get in the way of people living a full life?

- 5.) The United Methodist Social Creed orientates our denomination towards justice work. It in part reads: "We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress." How is our church doing in response towards the Social Creed?

Prayer: God, all good things come from you and we repent from using these things toward idolatrous ends. Guide us to truly believe wholly that the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs is reality, and to gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.