

Today I have to make a confession to you. I need to confess to you that when I arrive to the church on Fridays there is one thing on my mind. Today is the day I have to write a sermon. And the task of writing a sermon has guided much of what I have written on Fridays, re-worked on Saturdays, and delivered on Sundays. But just focusing on the task of writing a sermon on Fridays was the wrong way to approach this responsibility. Focused on the task of sermon writing meant I was not always focused on listening to what God was saying through the Scriptures.

Our Book of Order says that “the preached Word or sermon is to be based upon the written word. It is a proclamation of Scripture in the conviction that through the Holy Spirit Jesus Christ is present in the gathered people, offering grace and calling for obedience. Preaching requires diligence and discernment in the study of Scripture, the discipline of daily prayer, cultivated sensitivity to events and issues affecting the lives of the people, and a consistent and personal obedience to Jesus Christ.”

But as I examined my own sermon writing, I have come to believe that I have sometimes approached texts of Scripture with my mind already made up about what it is going to say. That keeps Scripture safe.

But it is important to approach Scripture with an open mind. And I have found some really unexpected things about Jeremiah. Some things about Jeremiah that have a lot to say to us today here in our community.

Last week I introduced Jeremiah as a prophet. A prophet is simply someone who tells the truth about what they see. And what Jeremiah saw was that God’s people were heading toward a period of real destruction. They were not being faithful to God and so God was going to allow an outside invader, the Babylonians, to conquer them and haul them off to slavery. Jeremiah uses the image of a good marriage gone bad to describe how God’s people turned their back on God.

There were several things that Jeremiah saw as their sins. They were being greedy. They were following other gods. But listen now as I read what else Jeremiah criticizes them for.

Read Jeremiah 17: 19-27

What does it mean to be faithful in worship today? Again, going back to the Presbyterian Book of Order, "Christian worship joyfully ascribes all praise and honor, glory and power to the triune God. In worship the people of God acknowledge God present in the world and in their lives. In worship, the faithful offer themselves to God and are equipped for God's service to the world."

I began this message by saying that by approaching sermon writing with a preset idea of what I would find, I was not being faithful in worship. I was not giving my best. I have sometimes approached worship as a task. I am sure I am not the only one to have done this.

But by approaching worship as a task is not being a faithful worshipper. It doesn't honor the Sabbath. And Jeremiah has some pretty harsh words for anyone who comes into worship as if it is a job that we clock in at 10 am and clock out by 11 am.

Jeremiah says to God's people during his time that they are to keep the Sabbath holy and not bring in any burden. He says that if you bring in a burden then you are not honoring the Sabbath. Their burden was that they were using the Sabbath gatherings as a place to sell their goods and try to make some money.

My burden was that I was bringing in the expectation that I had to write a sermon and I pretty much knew what this sermon was going to say. But I am not the only one who brings burdens to worship. What is the burden that some of you bring into worship today?

Some of you bring in the burden that you are scared at what is happening in your home. You feel the stress from your family or you feel the stress at work and you come in this morning holding back trust in God because you see things caving in against you.

Others bring in the burdens of feeling some unease with something at church. Maybe it is something you have heard that is happening in the national church or maybe it is something that displeases you here at ACPC. Others bring the burdens of anxiety as we approach national elections. This is a time of unease in our society. You may carry the burden of seeing things change too rapidly around you or maybe the burden of seeing things not change fast enough.

As I think about the conversations I have with folks in this church and in this community, I realize that we are a group of people that carry a lot of burdens into worship this morning.

But Jeremiah says that burdens being carried into worship is not good. We need to leave those burdens at the door. But we can't change can we? Heaping on burdens on ourselves is just our nature isn't it?

After telling the people to lay down their burdens on the Sabbath, Jeremiah then offers up a unique image of God.

Read Jeremiah 18: 1-11

God is like a potter. A potter who works at the wheel. A potter who is constantly making something new. Sometimes this potter has to break apart the old pot and start over.

If you are a craftsman or an artist like a potter, I am sure it is not easy to break apart an old creation. It is not easy to start over with something new. But Jeremiah says that sometimes that is what is necessary. Sometimes you have to break apart something in order for a new vision to emerge.

I think the reason that many of us carry burdens into worship is because if we carry something we can control that thing. It is like the new harness that we just got for our dog. We got that harness because when we would take our dog for a walk he would sometimes get spooked and be hard to control. So we got a new harness so that we could control his behavior.

We carry burdens because we want to control our burdens. I wanted to control the sermon and control what happens at worship. You may want to control your burdens so that you can control your family, your marriage, your employer or employees, or control your church.

But the Scripture that Bryan read this morning reminds us that we are all aliens on God's land. I don't know if we are legal or not but we are all aliens on God's land. We are dependant on God's hospitality.

Maybe many of us are not being faithful in worship because we come into worship carrying way too many burdens.

Maybe it is time we leave some burdens at the door and trust for God to reveal who God is to us.

Maybe all of the burdens we have been carrying into worship is preventing us for seeing what God is doing in our midst already and can do in our midst.

Maybe it is time to allow God to have thine own way. AMEN.

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-Text: Jeremiah 17:19-18:11

-Given: Oct. 17, 2010 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)