

Theme: -God has enough sacrifices
-God is tired of our playing religious games
-Cleanse ourselves – but it is God who truly forgives

August 8, 2010

God is Happy: True or False

Isaiah 1:10-20

What makes you happy? Here are a couple of suggestions: balloons, ice cream and cake, laughter with friends, enough money to purchase whatever you so desire, what other items, things or thoughts make you happy? Have you ever thought about what makes God happy? Do you suppose those very things that make you happy might make God happy as well?

Flip the coin over and what makes you sad or angry? There was a motor cycle accident in Iowa this past Sunday evening and the gentleman who died was a member of my first confirmation class in Waukon that makes me sad. A person who loses their house in a foreclosure, or has severed all relationships with family makes me sad. I get angry when we treat people with disrespect. So what do you suppose God gets angry at or what makes God sad? Do you care what makes God angry or sad?

We could think Old Testament and say God was speaking only to the evil of Isaiah's day; the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah, but I believe we need to hear the tone of the voice of God rather than to point a finger at a certain group of people. I believe with exasperation in God's voice we hear: "I have had enough of burnt offerings, I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or of goats. Bringing offerings is futile, incense in an abomination to me. Your new moon and appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them." (Selected verses Isaiah 1:11-12, 14 NRSV)

We are here so we might think to ourselves; God should be thrilled that we are here in worship. But wait God is the subject of worship, and for our worship to be pleasing it should be done God's way not our way.

God isn't pleased with the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah for they have placed their religious rituals as more important than God. They figure as long as I'm here, as long as I give my fair share, as long as I seek to do good and as long as I'm better than most that's all that counts. It is for this attitude that God is angry. More often than we might like to consider, we too think we have done enough, given enough, been good enough, worshipped enough and God says you are playing religious games.

The master of life is here this morning, do we care to come face to face with God worshipping God in God's terms or are we going to play religious games, hoping God doesn't notice our lack of enthusiasm or lack of honest worship? If God were to rate us today would God be happy with our worship or would God speak with contempt for us as God did for the rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah?

This morning we participated in three baptisms. I believe they were more than mere ritual, a hoop for people to jump through in order to receive the blessings of God. They are an act of obedience where we have come before God and asked for God's blessing and then promised to seek to follow as best we can. Not through rote or ritual or senseless repetitions of words. Not

because we are forced but because God is God. So we pray our actions are worthy of true worship the very opposite of the ruler of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah.

As a pastor I stand in awe of our God who allows us to come into God's presence. I stand in awe of our God who calls for us to stop playing religious games and come confessing our sinfulness and desiring to be made as white as snow. (I like preaching on snow in the summer when we sort of long for the refreshing feeling a new snow fall has.) I stand in awe of the God who calls us to reevaluate our worship and make it about God rather than things and rituals.

In order for our worship to be glorifying to God listen to these great words of direction for our lives; "cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow". (Isaiah 1:17 NRSV) As we come to worship God our focus is to be on God but there is also an external focus on the care and nurture of others especially those who can't care for themselves.

I take you back a number of years to the darkest of times in Cambodia history and a recent sentencing with this report by Kristy Salivera, " Former Khmer Rouge Official Sentenced to Serve 19-Year Prison Term, Kaing Guek Eav, the Secret Police Chief of the Khmer Rouge's deadly regime, was sentenced to a mere 35 years for reported war crimes and crimes against humanity, which include the murders of as many as 14,000 people, including the executions of 160 children in a single June day in 1977. The report, filed by Douglas Gillison went on to conclude that the man, who is referred to as Duch, his revolutionary name, will be given credit for the 11 years of detention he has served since his arrest in 1999." (Excerpt from July 27, 2010 Kristy Salivera)

So I ask us from Gods point of view, where is justice in the world, how do we rescue the oppressed and plead for those in need in our society and how do these actions fit into worshipping our God? If nothing else Isaiah causes us to look at ourselves, our purity of motive in worship and our actions of goodness.

We believe we worship a God of love but even those who love can be angry at what is being done in the world. My prayer is that God would be happy with us not because we know and follow the rituals, but because we are seeking to follow God more closely everyday of our lives. And my prayer is that we may we leave this place with a deep respect for how important our worship and actions are to our God.