

Sermon for 16 October 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: *Jeremiah* 31:27-34; Psalter: Psalm 119:97-104 (*Insert: Alternate leader and people*); 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8

“Can you believe this?”

Can we really push God around? Does God really say, “OK. I give up. Give him his toy.”

What are we talking about, anyway?

I know the Book of Jonah says God’s forgiveness made Jonah angry enough to die. Read in your pew bibles Chapter 4:6-11.

Let me put it another way. Are we in America so mad @ Putin that we’d rather send weapons to the last Ukrainian than do our ever-living darnedest to negotiate some kind of détente instead of going on fighting to the last Ukrainian, no matter what the top Ukrainian brass is still pushing for?

Have you stood in your shower some morning and begged, “God, I know there are people over there who are sick and tired of fighting at all ... who just want to STOP IT! Help them, Lord, more than we can!”

Have you school teachers ever gotten to that point with some student, or group of trouble-makers, or parents, or administrators?

Read the last few verses of today’s Jeremiah letter: “No longer shall they teach or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.”

We’re all a bunch of radicals. The Quakers have nothing on us.

It’s tricky business to herd cats.

Maybe I’m being hypocritical, but here we’ve been coming to worship for six months and hardly paid a dime towards our apportionments. That’s a cardinal sin for Methodists! And I’m the pastor!

Somebody should be fired here. I didn’t go to seminary to talk like this!

I went, as John Wesley says, to “escape the wrath that’s coming.”

Before you turn your cap around and march out of here in disgust, let me tell you you’re implicated as well as me. You like hearing God loves you. Somehow, in your prayer closets, in those nights alone, you haven’t stood up

to God as much as you could and said, "I can't do it without you! I'm tired of being half what you need, and it's time you made me what you need me to be!"

You translate this lesson. I've tried the best I can. It's time we push the unrighteous judge to the wall. Either God loves us, or not.

Let us pray.

Dear God, in this jumbled mess of messages, these good people have allowed me to speak for them in the terms Jesus put before his disciples that we've just read. In so many ways, we are watching long-agreed-upon ways of cooperating come apart in our world. We believe you have put us here to work together to improve the world we live in. In this one specific thing: the faithful, on-time payment of our apportionments to the Annual Conference we belong to, we believe we have a mission from you. Help us work out a way together to achieve that promptly, so that this year we will not be behind. We put ourselves in your hands. Take over, and bring us to joy and satisfaction with you.

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.