

Sermon for 25 August 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-23, 41-43; Psalter: 804 (*Response: Last phrase of 600*

— **“Wonderful words of life.”**) Psalm 84; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

Sermon

The ebullient coverage of the National Democratic convention in Chicago this week gives us a hint of the first lesson for today. There was a moment when the little nation of Israel savored power and enthusiasm, and that went into the historical record and remains with us to this day.

A relevant psalm is added to confirm Solomon’s momentary greatness.

Neither of these should lead us to think Israel was big or Solomon was sublime. Moments of greatness is all we have, as creatures bearing the “image of God.” All we get is the privilege of cooperating in this marvelous song and dance known as Creation.

All the Bible does is offer us images and stories to reflect on. To take them literally is to block the creative energy God continually spreads around..

Right now we’re undergoing exciting political developments that challenge our current despair or our tendency to say we’ll just stick to our own little gardens and take no part in larger social issues.

All this calls us to honor the Scriptural words about Solomon, moments of wisdom (in his time of king, and in the reflections written in his name and added to the story of Israel).

Then we turn to Paul and listen to his struggle with fights in the church, and his own times of literal imprisonment for whatever local issues he combatted as he walked across the Near East of his day inspiring trust and fresh faith in the goodness of God as show through Jesus Christ. “I am an ambassador in chains,” he says, “and I put on Gospel armor as a soldier suits up for battle.” “Love one another ... that’s the only way to show Jesus is believable and alive among us.” Again, words for our historical moment. Literally interpreted, I see it as something like, “Be pleased Trump’s viciousness is getting condemned by lots of Republicans...” “but don’t for one minute think that gives you Democrats an excuse for supporting this horrible murder of Palestinians, or for not doing better things than sending billions to Ukraine to fight Russia. We’re all miserable sinners, and our use of weapons is one of the worlds great evils, just like our focus on wealth and power and self-defense ... which isn’t defense, in any Jesus statement or act in scripture or in honest self-study.

Finally, we have another session of literalism by John, “Eat my flesh, drink my blood.!” What possessed him to use such imagery? Why do we hang onto it? It’s gross, in so many people’s eyes. Could you do better? Were you there in those closing days of the first century A.D., when things were getting worse and worse for Christian people and their Roman governors as

well. How would you say, "It's right here. Hold it in your hands. Take it like food and drink to starving people dying of thirst. Use it. Pass it around. Connect with your inner reserves that God Almighty implants in you every day."

These are why we're here today, these images, these testimonies, these tools to use in our private times and our most clearly unselfish relations with our nearest companions and those who are farthest from our intimacy: the imprisoned, by police or drugs or disease or any of the things that dog human beings in our time. Don't waste time saying it used to be better ... some things are 'way better than ever before... God is up to much more than we imagine, much less practice yet.

Just work at it. Gather, embrace, and then go home to stir the pot of goodness in your individual kitchen.

Come back soon.

Hallelujah.

Amen.