

Jeremiah quotes God as stating something so basic. Our human values, our cultural priorities are not the same as those of God. We worship and bow down, but we do so to idols of a Mortgage, Security, Profit, Investments, the newest gadgets, the best car; rather than simply trusting and worshipping God. In the story of the Garden of Eden, God offered that humanity could have ANYTHING in all the Garden, anything except the fruit of 2 trees; but they saw that the fruit of those trees was to be desired, took and ate, trying to make themselves like God.

In the year 321 Roman Emperor Constantine converted from worshipping the Gods of Rome to Jesus Christ and with the Emperor all of Rome became Christian. There is a story that in the 8th Century, the Bishop of Jerusalem decided that all Israel and Palestine should be Christian and all the Jews should leave. The Jewish population were in an uproar, ready to revolt, so the Bishop declared that he would hold a Contest, where as Bishop he would debate any Jewish leader. If he won all the Jews would leave in 3 days making Israel Christian, if by some miracle the Jewish leader won then they could remain under Roman rule. But no one dared debate the Bishop of Jerusalem, with the possibility of being blamed for their exile from the Promised Land. Finally, Shlameel the Street Sweeper agreed that he would debate the Bishop, because he had nothing more to lose than his homeland; HOWEVER, he insisted it be a SILENT DEBATE.

At Noon on the appointed day two chairs were set on a platform at the center of the City, the Bishop in one, Shlameel the Street Sweeper in the other. Absolute silence fell over the whole city as the Bishop rose and pointed to the mountains of the Horizon; but Shlameel pointed straight at the Ground.

Not missing a beat, the Bishop raised 3 Fingers; in response Shlameel shook his head and raised a single defiant finger!

The Bishop began to sweat profusely, as he brought out the Bread and Wine of Communion. At which Shlameel sat down, opened a brown paper bag, pulled out an Apple and took a bite!

The Bishop screamed in exasperation and declared "You win!" At which the crowd erupted in cheering and applause.

The Priests crowded around the Bishop asking what happened.

The Bishop stated, I pointed to the mountains quoting the Psalm I look to the Hills from whence does my help come? But he pointed to the Earth, saying that GOD is here and now!

SO I raised 3 fingers naming the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; to which the faithful all nodded. But my opponent raised One finger to Heaven, emphasizing that The Lord our God is One, who alone we shall worship with all your heart, mind, soul and strength!

So, in order to win I brought out the Body and Blood of Christ, and he brought the Apple of Adam's Fall!

Meanwhile, all the populace asked Shlameel what happened.

The Street Sweeper said: The Bishop pointed to the horizon telling us to get out, I told him we were staying The Bishop said we had 3 Days to leave, I responded not 1 person will go.

Then the Bishop brought out his lunch, so I brought out mine.

Our stories, decisions, symbols, meals and customs are heavily laden with meaning and importance to us. However, the priorities and customs of our culture emphasize where we have come from, our quest for Control, Security and Profit.

A few weeks ago, I named that we are a Presbyterian Church, however, only about 10% of us came as Presbyterians. So what does it mean to be Presbyterian?

While being Presbyterian means that we believe in One God known to us through 3 persons, and celebrating baptism and Communion, we have the Cross and Worship, most churches do all of those things. Being Presbyterian means that we elect our leaders, Elders, Deacons and Pastors from our

membership; and at every level of Church governance above the local there is equal membership at Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly, and at all Committees, equal between Ministers and Elders. I knew an Episcopal Church, and they have Elders, but when the Elders vote, it becomes an advisory vote to the Ministers; in the Catholic Church only the Priests vote; but in the Presbyterian Church: Your vote matters just as much as mine as a Pastor with 38 years experience and a Doctorate.

What has always excited me about the Presbyterian Church is that rather than being political our church has modeled for the society a counter-cultural position based on our faith in God.

From 1915 to 1920 in the United States, what was the hot Social Issue, even before Prohibition? Women's Suffrage, guaranteeing the right to Vote. Since the days of Pilgrims, church women have voted. Even before the House and Senate had passed the 19th Amendment, women in the Presbyterian Church were serving as Elders and Deacons, meaning that they were elected and ordained to Office. Is the Ordination of women still an issue in some churches?

In the 1950s, before any other denomination, Margaret Towner was ordained as a Minister of Word & Sacrament.

In the 1960's what was going on in the United States: Civil Rights. For a Confession of Faith to be Adopted by the Church requires 2 years of discussion in Committees, then approving that Confession at a meeting of the General Assembly, then another year for ratification by 2/3 of all the Presbyteries. King's Assassination kicked off the riots of 1968 but in 1967, Presbyterian had already adopted the Confession of 1967 that professes we believe all people are created equal, with the same rights.

In the 1970s was Divorce a hot issue? The question came up whether a Minister going through a Divorce would lose their Ordination and no longer be a Minister? The fact of the matter is that those circumstances often tear a church apart, and if it were to happen a pastor probably ought to resign from that church until after their life is straightened out again; but because Elders and Deacons do not lose their ordination, neither do Pastors.

In 1983 having had primarily two Presbyterian Churches since before the start of the Civil War, we merged these in reunion creating a new Presbyterian Church. In 2001, I was a Commissioner to the General Assembly and I am proud to have played an important role in recommending we do something totally counter-cultural. While each side of the Homosexuality debate wanting to win, we created a 3 year period for the most extreme individuals to meet together regularly for Bible Study and prayer. What happened was that hearts were changed. Everyone came to recognize that the others were reading the Bible faithfully. SO what was decided was that who your Elders and Deacons and Pastors are, is up to each congregation. There may be a community in San Francisco or New York City where the population are Gay, where having a Gay Pastor is exactly the right person. In Green Valley, if you want your pastor to have grey hair, glasses, and artificial knees like you do, that is who we call.

Yesterday our Presbytery gathered and a major question we discussed was "How does your church influence the community around it?" And it occurred to me that our Mission Statement is: "To Make Christ Known through Reconciliation, communicating respect and love to all!" We know that political divisions separate us, we are polarized. I wish that the church, our church could be a place where persons on both sides, felt safe to come and talk and listen.

Luke 14 begins by saying Jesus told them a parable, except he does not immediately tell them the parable. Instead, after providing a counter-cultural interpretation to the host and to the guests, Jesus then tells them: A Man gave a great Feast and invited everyone, but they each made silly excuses: "I bought a field and need to go inspect it." Would you ever buy property without seeing it? "I bought 5 yoke of oxen, and I need to go see them." Would you ever buy a new Car or a business without taking stock of what you

have? I have gotten married and I need to meet her.” REALLY? SO the Master instructs the servant, “Go invite the poor, the maimed, blind and lame.” Still there was room, so the Master instructed him again to “Go invite those from the alleys and hedges, the highways and strangers, all to come into the house of the Lord.”