

At a recent Presbytery's meeting, I ran into a friend who commented "Do you realize how blessed we are, at 65 to each find a church that still wants to use us as pastors?" Thank you for this Call. There are a great number of blessings in being your pastors at Valley Presbyterian. Having our Arizona Diamondbacks play in the World Series, I recognized a blessing I had not considered before. The Director of the FBI testified this week, that while Jewish people represent only 2.4% of our population that over 60% of all Hate Crimes this year have been perpetrated against the Jews. This is not about Politics, or Free Speech, it is about Religious Hate. Our world is in chaos, after a summer of drought with months of triple digits, anxiety and anger over Russia destroying Ukraine; now over HAMAS brutally killing children and seniors in front of their families in Israel; Israel's leaders being so desperate to get those who committed these crimes that civilians are being killed to get them; our American leaders have been trying to score political points with their base by approving this Bill and blocking that one without providing leadership or working cooperatively, HOWEVER for a few hours each evening we were distracted by something where there was not killing or hatred. I was incredibly moved that while we could not hear the words and did not need to, after each teams' pitchers were taken off the mound to the Dugout, their Coaches gave them Pep-talks about all the Good they had given their team.

I was terrible at sports as a kid. I was the scrawny kid, last picked for a team, always sent out to far left field beyond where anyone could hit. Later, as the Father of Little Leaguers, I was even a lousy fan! Being the Pastor of the whole Community I knew the kids on all the teams and would root for each of them to get a good hit or make a great play, regardless of the team.

The one game I remember loving when we were very little, was playing Red Rover. All the kids would line up in two lines, and when you were called out, you ran with everything within you, hurtling your 60-70 pound body against the grip of the others. If you managed to get through, you could take someone back with you and when you could not you then joined the others, until everyone was part of one side.

This passage about Joshua seems especially appropriate for our times. Joshua is one of the few who had been a slave in Egypt, who survived the 40 years in the wilderness and came into the Promised Land. All throughout the 40 years, Joshua accompanied and followed the direction of Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Finally, as they arrived at the Promised Land, Moses died. Listening to GOD, Joshua had the Levite Priests carry the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan as the people followed. Joshua had those who had not been circumcised in the wilderness, circumcised. Entering the Promised Land, the people gathered food and celebrated the Passover anew, as the Manna of the wilderness ended. Fitting then, that the name JOSHUA is the Hebrew version of the Name JESUS, meaning SAVIOR.

Imagine Joshua's excitement? Leaving Egypt, they had been 5,500 slaves, in the wilderness provided for by GOD, their numbers had swollen to 140,000 survivors. Like the first day of school/ the first day of a new job/ the night before getting your Driver's License/ the night before battle for a soldier all wrapped up in one, Joshua was about to lead the Nation from the Wilderness into Battle at Jericho. Joshua could not sleep and walks through their encampment, checking that others are resting, checking their sentries, looking out over the land he is about to cross leading them into battle against the enemy, formulating battle plans. When, in the half-light before dawn, Joshua sees something unexpected: a Stranger! Is it possible after 40 years, there could be someone he does not know among the people he is to lead? Is this a Spy sent to attack them? You can hear the footsteps of untried General Joshua crossing to confront the stranger, Joshua's sword scraping as its drawn from his scabbard. Joshua barks "Are you for us, or against us?" When the Heavenly stranger responds confidently, "Neither. But as Commander of the Army of the LORD!" Reminiscent of Jacob wrestling with GOD to become Israel, Joshua asks what he must do, and the Commander says "Take off your shoes, for this land is holy." What if in all our conflicts,

all the contests, at all the Football Games where each team pray to GOD and cross themselves that they win; If instead we recognized this life is holy? God is not on either side, all life is a gift from GOD!

The book of the Prophet Micah is a totally different kind of Scripture than we regularly read, no Parables, no Covenant. Micah has been called by GOD, to represent GOD's Legal Case against the People of Israel. Micah was no Lawyer, no Priest, not a Rich man. During the time of Kings in Israel, when the Northern 10 Tribes commanded all power; Micah was a poor Farmer from the South who plead the Case of the POOR.

To understand the Courtroom-Setting of this, you need to recall when GOD first called Abraham & Moses, GOD declared that the Heavens and the Earth, the Mountains and Trees, Rivers and Lakes would all serve as Witnesses to those Covenants. NOW, GOD uses the Mountains and Hills as both WITNESSES and JURY for GOD's LAWSUIT. In this case it is not one Team versus another, one Nation against another, but The Case of THE PEOPLE Versus GOD ALMIGHTY.

Like a Legal Proceeding, GOD feels UnJustly Accused of People's Abandonment and GOD Demands: "My People, What Have I Done to You?" "How Have I Burdened You?" Answer Me!

Then GOD lays out evidence, How GOD brought us up out of Slavery, Redeeming us, giving us History's greatest Leaders (Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia), Excuse Me Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

2nd, GOD names how Moab's King Balak plotted to use the Prophet Balaam to curse Israel, until Balaam's Donkey opened its mouth to tell the Prophet "Balaam, You Donkey, Can you not see the COMMANDER of the ARMY of the LORD Standing in our Way with a Sword?"

3rd "Remember 40 years in the Wilderness and all the MIRACLES showered upon you when you needed?"

WHOOOPS... With a change of heart, the People recognize their wrong and seek to pay a SETTLEMENT. Every COVENANT, Every SACRAMENT (Baptism and Communion), Every OFFERING, whenever we PRAY, we are not the Prime Initiator, we are not the CONSUMER! Whether as CREATOR, or SAVIOR, or SPIRIT challenging us to BELIEVE and ACT in faith, GOD is the INITIATOR and we respond in thanksgiving.

So what is an appropriate response for all GOD has done for us? How do we embody our humility before GOD? If the Offering of Thanksgiving was a Lamb or Fatted Calf, how many Calves does one Offer to GOD? Would the Offering to GOD be Thousands of Rams, 10s of 1,000s of Rivers of Olive Oil? Do we like Abraham offer our Firstborn to atone for our sins, the FRUIT of our BODIES for the SINS of our SOULS? What is Enough? As asked over and over again throughout the Scriptures, "What Must I do to inherit Eternal Life?"

MICAH as GOD's Solicitor replies: "What does the LORD require of you? To ACT JUSTLY, to LOVE MERCY, and to WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD." Somehow in Human History, JUSTICE has become RETRIBUTION VENGEANCE; when according to Scripture JUSTICE/RIGHTEOUSNESS/PEACE are interwoven in the word SHALOM. For we cannot have any of the others, without all three JUSTICE/RIGHTEOUSNESS/PEACE.

MERCY is an Act of GRACE/COMPASSION/EMPATHY as in the GOOD SAMARITAN who cares for one who had hated him without limitation.

HUMILITY recognizes our right relationship, we are not the ones who can choose or reject GOD, when life is over we cannot expect to HEAR "WELL DONE GOOD & FAITHFUL SERVANT." Instead as Luke reports Jesus said in Chapter 17 "SUPPOSE you had a slave plowing the field or looking after Sheep. When they come in from the field, would you say 'COME SIT AT MY PLACE AND EAT?' Would a MASTER not say: 'GET YOURSELF READY, PREPARE MY SUPPER, WAIT WHILE I EAT & DRINK.' Would a MASTER 'THANK THEIR PROPERTY' when they only did what they were required to do? SO ALSO, when we have done everything we were to do, should say, "WE HAVE ONLY DONE WHAT SERVANTS WERE CALLED TO DO."

ACT JUSTLY, LOVE MERCY, WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD. Red Rover, Red Rover, God wants you to come over!