

January 23, 2011
Middle Amana Church
Emilie Hoppe, Elder

Scripture: Genesis 1: 1 - 3
Acts 17: 22 - 31
Psalm 19

Theme: God and the World

Testimony: July 25, 1715 Ursula Mayer, Ronneburg
German Service No. 426 "Himmel, Erde, Luft und Meer"
No. 123 (verses 1 - 6) "Das Wort von deiner Kraft"
English Service

No. 32 "God Who Madest Earth and Heaven"
No. 271 "Almighty Father Heaven and Earth"

Jan. 22, 2011 Regular Service
Written by Emilie Hoppe
" God and the World"

Read : Genesis 1 1 -3 and Acts 17 verses 22 – 31

The other day I was listening to the radio, a Christian call-in show, and the topic was God and the world. A man called in and said that God must hate the world for the world is a sinful, evil place. He then listed some of the truly awful things that have gone on lately and some horrible things that have happened years past – slavery, the Holocaust, the many vicious wars, the persecution of Christians around the world and so forth. He made a case, I have to say, for the wicked, depravity of the world. Then he said that Christians everywhere should reject the world and should avoid contact with the world.

After that, I was pretty disheartened so I turned off the radio.

But I have since wondered what the broadcaster said in reply to this man.

Or if any others called in to dispute what he said.

And I have asked myself...

Does God hate the world?

Before we answer that –let’s talk about the WORLD.

In the Bible, WORLD is used for both the tangible and the intangible – First it refers to the tangible, physical realm – the earth itself, the broad seas, the sky above, the plants, the animals, the human beings that inhabit this specific physical space... The earth and all living things - the world.

Secondly, In the Bible WORLD may also mean society of man – the social and cultural interaction of men and women. Men’s governments and markets, social networks and economies constructed to help man obtain his highest aspirations or his basest desires.

Some people would argue that because people so often make bad choices when dealing with one another that the world is bad. They point to the vast number of ignorant, cruel and downright wicked things that people have done to one another, and they say, “The World is a horrible place.” And it’s hard not to agree with them.

And because mankind can be cruel may be the only rational thing to do is to reject and despise the world -- to reject the world for all the injustice, the violence, the foul vice and malevolence it harbors.

Therefore then, we might conclude that God being rational and just..... God must hate the world.

In response to that conclusion, I counter with Jesus’s own words, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish

but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3 16 – 17.

Spoken by God’s Son, the Word made flesh – here is the truth- God does not hate the world, he loves it. He loves it so much that he gave his Son to save it.

Knowing this truth, how can we doubt for a minute that the world is not worthy of being saved? Sin-riddled it might be, it is worth saving. After all how can we doubt it? For God himself created the world and all that in there is, and he Himself called it good, who are we to say otherwise?

Who are we to condemn the world and reject it, when God himself means to save it. And if God means to save the world, we know as surely as we know anything that he will succeed.

So if we are tempted by the depravity we see to weep, if we are tempted by the recent bad news of evil afoot in Arizona, or the seemingly endless stream of greedy intentions and violent choices we see around us, if we are tempted to look at this stuff and give in or give up, or much worse yet, If we are tempted to be as bigoted as those whom we judge, if we are tempted to call those people we don’t understand evil, let’s stop and remember that God did not do any of those things.

Looking down upon a sin-filled world, He could have done anything. He could have done nothing, but he chose to send his Son.

In love he did the most compassionate, the most caring, the most loving thing he could do. So what should we learn from this?

What does that tell us about God and what does that tell us about how we, as his children, should relate to the world?

For instruction, let’s look at what Paul was telling the Athenians. The Athenians were known for being a very rational group of people, well educated, well read, they were eager to learn and eager to hear new ideas so that they could discuss and debate them. The Athenians were also a religious people and had constructed for themselves a whole, intricate network of gods and goddesses to which they had built many beautiful statues and temples and they were in the habit of making sacrifices and leaving offerings of food and wine at their temples.

Paul upon visiting Athens was struck by how many different temples there were and how many idols. This upset him, but instead of leaving town, he stuck around and talked to people.

Paul says, Hey, I know you guys are very religious. Then he said, and I quote, “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar

with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”

He didn't sneer at them, or get angry, or call them names, he said they were ignorant of the truth, but he didn't blame them for that or refuse to have anything to do with them. Instead in a respectful tone speaking to them as rational, thoughtful people, he lays out the case for God the creator and for Jesus Christ.

And he does so in a very logical way – pointing out that even the Athenians as religious as they are do not really know to whom they are praying... then he tells them and I quote, *“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. **25** And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. **26** From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. **27** God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. **28** ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’^[b] As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’^[c]*

IT STRUCK ME THAT HERE PETER IS USING VERY INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE – HE DOES NOT SAY, “GOD IS CLOSE TO ME” HE SAYS, GOD IS NOT FAR FROM ANY OF US....

And Paul talks to them using concepts they can understand and relate to – they can understand a creator who is over all, a creator who is Lord of Heaven and Earth and Paul points out that someone who is creator over all, logically that being has no need of human-made temples or offerings left at alters. Rather, God himself gives life and breath to everything else. Then Paul explains that God the creator of all, God did all of these things so that we his children could have a relationship with him and seek him out.

Right here, Paul does a very smart thing. He quotes two of the Greek's most learned and respected poets. First he quotes Epimenides- now Epimenides was a shepherd who had fallen asleep in a cave and awakened with the gift of poetry and reportedly, the Athenians believed, the gift of prophecy – 600 years before Christ was born Epimenides wrote these words about Zeus:

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one— The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies! But thou art not dead: thou livest and abidest forever, For in thee we live and move and have our being.

The Athenians would have known this poem by heart and would have understood that Paul was drawing a clear line from what Epimenides the poet had written about Zeus and those liars who thought they could entomb him and Christ who some thought could be contained in a tomb, but instead rose from the dead.

And then Paul quotes Aratus, the stoic poet who in writing about Zeus said that “we are his offspring”. His children. Again the Athenians would have recognized that reference and understood it.

Now Paul does not call these two poets false idol worshippers, no he basically says, “well they are right, but they’ve got the name wrong” – the God who is in charge of this universe is the one and only God.

The creator of all things. The living God who is neither ancient myth nor dead stone, but alive in us. So he if is alive and abides forever as your own poets claim, then he is alive now and waiting for you to evolve in your understanding and learn more about him. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, Paul says, but now he wants us to repent of old ways and know him.

Intrigued by this discussion which builds upon their own philosophy and their own traditions, the Athenians want to hear more. They ask Paul to tell them more and Paul tells them about Jesus and His Resurrection and some Athenians reject that, but others want to hear more and they eventually become followers of Christ. Eventually the Greek church becomes a stronghold for Christianity.

So what can we learn from this?

First we can learn something about how to relate to others from this passage> When we don’t agree with someone, instead of walking away or becoming angry, we should do as Paul did – we should try to learn where they are coming from and upon learning that, we can respectfully talk with them in a way that makes sense to them and in a way that engages them in a dialogue. Being a Christian does not mean rejecting the world or rejecting people who don’t agree with us. No, being a Christian means that we should share our faith and spread the news in a way that is inclusive, not exclusive and in a way that convinces not angers. Our job is to convict not incite. To embrace not to push away.

Second, we can learn something about worship from this passage. You can be religious, very religious, and be wrong.

Like the Athenians we can have the most sincere belief in these beautiful idols built upon half-truths and misunderstandings. These idols are of our own making, not God’s. And often these idols of ours they are about what we want or need or desire. We

all can name a few false idols in our hearts –things we think we really need or want – money, the big career, the big TV set, you name it. We build it up, make sacrifices for it and pretend that it will help us. But we're wrong.

In faith, We need to worship God the King, not some idol we have built up based upon our own desires.

God the Creator and King is very near to us. He is not far from us as Paul says. And God who is near to us at all times wants us to seek him out. . . repent of our false idols and turn to him alone, placing trust in him for all things. Too often we trust our false idols –our money, our jobs,– but we ought instead to trust our true God for all things.

And we know we can trust him in all things, because he has given us proof of his love in the form of Jesus. Instead of allowing our lives and our world to be swallowed up by sin, in love he has sent the Savior to redeem us.

Finally our relationship to the world, as children of God, should mirror that of God's relationship to the world. Yes, We should acknowledge that the world is a sin-filled place and that sin, the wrong we do to one another and to God, can cause suffering and pain, but for all of that, for all of that, the world is not beyond all hope.

We can reject the sin and still embrace the hope.

Everyday we can look about us and see things of great and lasting beauty – God created things like the beauty of a new dawn or the touch of snowfall upon the tree limbs. God created loveliness is all around us and it is in the eyes of our children and friends, in the smiles of co-workers and the voices of our loved ones. God is in those whom we love, just as he is in us.

YES, in Him we live and breath and have our being as Paul reminds the Athenians. Yes, that is true poetry.

And while we can see things in the world that are good and of God. Our hope is not in the world, but in God. Our hope is in God and Jesus his Son from whom all good springs and in whom all things will work together for good.

For by God's hand the world will be saved. And our joy should be in knowing that God our Father, will succeed.

Let us read Psalm 19

Benediction:

Dear Heavenly Father,

The heavens indeed proclaim your Glory.

Thanks be to you Father for your creation.

Seeing the value of your works you have sent your Son to redeem your Children.

*Bless us and keep us, as we seek to do your will in accordance to your Holy Word.
Help us Father to treat others with compassion and understanding, to reach out
to all as brothers and sisters in faith.*

All this we pray in the name of your Son, our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ,

AMEN