

When God Gets Weary

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

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Does the source of all that is, the author and engineer of evolution, and nature, and history, does God Almighty get worn out? The prophet Isaiah says so. God gets tired of church. God gets tired of our assemblies, and of our holidays. God gets tired of our Christmas and our Easter celebrations and our General Conferences and our Annual Conferences.

Isaiah God says "... your new moons and your appointed festivals, my soul hates. They have become a burden to me and I am weary of bearing them." A religion without justice and mercy makes God tired. And it is the consistent truth of every religion on the face of the earth that we talk a better game than we play.

We come to worship in our mosques on Friday evenings and in our synagogues on Fridays and on Saturdays and in our churches on Sundays, and then we leave to war against each other all week long. A religion that is not lived out in the world through peace and justice makes God tired.

God's expectation of us is apparently that the rubber ought to hit the road, that we ought to walk the walk as well as talking the talk. Learn to do good and seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphaned, and plead for the widow
Isaiah's God says.

What can we do when God gets tired? Well, the word from God through Isaiah is this: In Isaiah 1: 1-:8 God says, "Come now let us argue it out." Come now let us argue it out. Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be like snow. Though they are red like crimson they shall become like wool. Come now let us argue it out, says the Lord.

The solution when God becomes tired of us not doing what we say we will do is for us to come and argue it out with the Lord. The solution is encounter, the solution is meeting.

One of the things I really value about Foundry is that we are a church where we expect something to happen in worship. We don't go through the motions, do our weekly duty. We are a congregation that expects something to happen during our worship service.

I was sharing with Eileen this past week that one of the things I appreciate about our preparation together for the worship service is because as we prepare we give ourselves to the expectation and anticipation that something is really going to happen here for ourselves and for you. That we will truly encounter the divine. Eileen's mission statement for her work is "to usher the people of God into the presence of God." Eileen gives herself to the expectation that in worship we are really going to encounter the divine and that something is going to happen to us. We expect to meet God here.

I walked into the choir room one day when Eileen and Teresa Severin were rehearsing. And at first I thought something was wrong, Teresa was singing, "Take My Life and Let it be Consecrated Lord to Thee." Tears were streaming down her face as she sang and tears were streaming down Eileen's face as she played. I thought something was wrong but I realized that it was not that there was a problem. It was as they were rehearsing for worship something was happening. It wasn't merely a rehearsal of getting the technique right. They were meeting God. They were preparing to lead us as a congregation to lead us into God's presence.

I think that sometimes churches engage, that we all engage, in what I call politics without encounter. Politics without encounter is trying to get what we want from God or from other people without letting God or other people get at us. It is trying

to maneuver in order to get what we want instead of having a meeting. "Come now, let us argue it out", says the Lord. "Encounter me, engage me, become vulnerable to me, the Lord says. Do not try to get me to do what you want me to do. Do not try to get me to be the kind of God you want me to be. Meet me, encounter me."

We are celebrating the completion of the first year of Debra Whitten's presence with us as associate pastor. When our beloved Walt Shropshire retired after so many years of serving Foundry so well, we were clear we wanted our new associate to be African American.

So when Walt retired, we asked the bishop for an African-American associate because we were a church in Washington, DC committed to inclusively and except when we were lucky enough to get an African American student intern from the seminary, we were an all white clergy staff.

When we asked the bishop for an African-American associate.

A lot of people told me that we would not get a good one. They said it would be the kiss of death for an African-American clergy person's career to come to Foundry Church, a reconciling congregation. Debra chose to come anyway.

For the last year, consistently and under some pressure, she has been trying to help us get to meet her. Not just Debra Whitten the African-American associate pastor that we wanted, but Debra. Not just Debra Whitten the female, clergy person but Debra. Not just Debra Whitten the young adult, clergy person but Debra.

I am fully convinced that because of Debra's decision to come here and because of the way that she has chosen to seek to meet us, to love us, and to let us meet her that she is going to be one of the great transformational leaders of this next generation of United Methodist who are somehow going to be able to figure out how to do what those of us who are older have not done -- to really get past

thinking of people in terms of these boxes of race and gender and sexual orientation.

Really, none of us are fully defined by these things. All of us hope for the day we can sit down at the table and meet people in a way race, and the gender and the sexual orientation will not be the definitive thing that we see in one another.

God says, “Come let us argue together.” Let us meet. Let us encounter each other. Let our differences be there and let us meet each other past and through our differences.

I was thinking this week also of Ralph Williams, our lay leader. Ralph attended General Conference this year and was a delegate to Jurisdictional Conference. In terms of purely political thinking, we did not do well at General Conference this year. We were not very successful at advancing the commitments we have. But Ralph came back from General Conference encouraged and energized. And the reason is that when Ralph went to General Conference and to Jurisdictional Conference he was not just doing church politics. He did some church politics, but he really was not just doing church politics. He was encountering and meeting people including the very people who wanted to keep him and Foundry Church marginalized.

And this is where the energy is. This is where the refreshment is. This is where we get past the weariness and the tiredness that drags us and all of creation and God, down--- when we manage to get past the point of trying to get each other to do what we want each other to do and manage to truly encounter and meet each other and come to know each other through and past the differences.

I mourn the passing of the day when as Phil Wogaman talks about it; he could look out on a Sunday morning, and see George McGovern sitting here to his left, and the Clintons sitting here in the center and the Doles sitting to his right.

From time to time, some of our Log Cabin members here at Foundry have told me that it is easier to be gay at Foundry than to be a Republican. If that is true that really is a shame. A church ought to be a place of encounter and of meeting a place where we bring our differences and meet each other through and beyond our differences. And discover that which unites us.

There are reasons why this kind of coming together would not hold, but I have a dream that if somehow all of these folk could have prayed together then maybe we could have worked past our differences on the hill. Maybe if they could have worked together on the hill then they could have worked together and helped the nations of the world in the U.N. And maybe the world would be a different place today.

I think this is why Isaiah preached to Israel, to God's people, saying it really depends on you. If we can not be together and come to know each other, and come to care about each other past our differences within the church of Jesus Christ how do we ever expect the world around us to do it?

My father was a Republican. He was a great fan of the Republican senator, of his day, Jacob Javits of New York. He was miffed that Javits was never given serious consideration as a presidential candidate because he was Jewish. My father used to say to me when I was growing up that if we continued to exclude people for consideration for the presidency because of their religion, race or ethnicity, then we would continue to get the same kind of presidents that we have been getting.

There are a lot of Republicans who seek justice, who care about the oppressed and the orphans and the widows, and if there is something about Foundry Church that causes Republicans to not feel fully welcome here, it is we who are losing out. We ought to fix it. I've been thinking about declaring September invite a Republican to church month.

It is not about getting what we want and having our way. It is not about winning our point of view, it is not about politics, and it is not about maneuvering. It is all about meeting one another. It is about growing through the process of encountering others; we can win the battle and become lesser people if we are not careful. We can win the battle and become lesser people if we are not very, very careful.

I am grateful to Foundry Church because I think I am a better person and a better pastor than I was when I walked in the door two years ago. Do you know why I think that is? Because there has been enough times here at Foundry Church when things have not gone my way, and I have not gotten what I wanted. And in the process of not getting what I have wanted. I have met and encountered people of different opinions and different desires and different focuses in their life. As a result of those meetings I think I have grown as a pastor and a person.

There are times that I have gotten what I wanted, but I have not grown as a person in the process. It is not about getting what we want. It is meeting the other and growing and becoming more whole, more understanding, more patient and a better person in the process.

It is in the encounter where we are transformed. Our sins, which are like scarlet, are made like snow.

We are transformed and God in a mysterious way becomes more God through this meeting. God is energized and refreshed and amazing things happen along. The world becomes a better place and wars end, and hungry people are fed, and justice emerges.