



A Note from the Pastor's Corner

The winds of change are once again blowing fierce, strong, and unabated. Just as when Moses went again and again to the Pharaoh and demanded him to “let my people go”, so Hosni Mubarak refused to release his grip on the people of Egypt.

Even though the biblical story illustrates and affirms time and again that God preferentially and actively supports those who are oppressed, those who are the oppressors become so intoxicated from their addiction to power and control that they refuse to relinquish it. Often, the oppressor invokes the name of God as if to say that God is “on their side”. And so it was when those African-descended Americans who had been enslaved by European-descended Americans demanded to be set free.

The thirst for freedom was felt by both the enslaved and the abolitionists who supported them. And nothing would slake that thirst – nothing but the demand be met that they be set free. That same thirst is being voiced throughout the Middle East. We see history unfolding before our very eyes with events that are changing the complexion of the world’s power structures. We do not know what that change will look like, but the voice of the oppressed people will continue to echo off the pyramids, flow through the wadis, and move the reeds of the wilderness until the desire for freedom that has been awakened is fulfilled.

Oddly, we are seeing something similar right here in the Land of the Free. Although the details may be different, the thirst and demands are similar. Over the last four decades, the people of America – you, me, and millions upon millions like us – have seen the slow but relentless shrinking of our great middle class as the underclass of poor and impoverished swells.

By now, you know the details – how the average CEO now receives about 460 times the amount of compensation that the average production worker in their company is paid as compared to about 25 times back in 1970. That means that by lunch break on January 2nd, CEOs could punch out, never work another minute, and *still* receive more than their average production worker. And who knows how much wealth is being transferred and accumulated by the Wall Street crowd and the banking and energy sectors.

At the same time, the attitude of the average American has been manipulated so that they view certain of their neighbors as being “the enemy” – the one responsible for their declining standard of living. For a while it was the steelworkers – until they were put in their place. Then it was the air traffic controllers – until they were put in their place. There was the white collar and pink collar enemy that was put in its place by green carding and off-shoring. Recently the autoworkers became the enemy – and have now been put in their place. And welfare recipients have almost always been a target.

Today the enemy is the public worker and the arguments are, as before, financial: debt, funding, and entitlements.

But today we see public workers and supporters taking a stand against the forces that would put them in their place. How this will end only time will tell. Even though God preferentially sides with the oppressed, the timing and nature of God’s action is not according to our liking but according to God’s purpose. And, the answer to “Who are the oppressed?” is not so simple.

Though we do not know how or when or if God will act, what we *do* know is *why* God demanded that Pharaoh let his people go. The first reason was “*so they may serve God*”. The second reason was so Pharaoh and the world may know “*there is not one like God in all the earth*”. In other words, God does not grant freedom just so people can enjoy life. Freedom and serving God go hand-in-hand.

The released slaves in Egypt took with them everything they could lay their hands on, including livestock, so they might, in the words of Moses, “serve Yahweh our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve Yahweh.” They were prepared to serve God in whatever way God may have wanted at the time.

It makes me wonder. If a people receive freedom and then refuse to serve God as God wishes to be served, will they have their freedom taken from them? The Jewish people lost their freedom when they were carted off in exile to Babylon. According to the prophets, that happened because the people refused to serve God as God wished to be served. They maintained an outwardly religious posture, but it was far from pleasing to God.

Our nation received freedom. Now it seems we are losing it, but it isn’t through the quick, “traditional” means of military defeat from without or coup from within. We are losing it by a slower, fiscal manipulation, all the while looking suspiciously at our neighbor as the enemy.

Could this be the result of worshipping at the altar of the almighty dollar instead of truly being in service to God? Only time, and our own prophets, will tell.

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud