

Newsletter Reflections for June

June begins a different season of the year: sometimes with signs of changes in temperature and humidity; sometimes less by the weather changing as heat and humidity may have arrived before the calendar agrees it is summer. The calendar marks summer's arrival nearer the end of the month, yet our vacation schedules usually mean we begin thinking of summer nearer June's beginning and often assign summer a three month reign over our activities. As we enter this summer there are some signs of hope. There are also signs that we as a people and a world have not learned very much from the tragic events of the last 12 to 18 months; signs that we have not changed our ways of looking at the world or each other in ways which will make lives better. In many ways that should not be surprising if (or when) we turn to historical records. Long before we began to use the tools of writing to record history, we fashioned the record to suit the image we wished to convey about ourselves. There is a widely held saying about history is that it is written by the victors...and that is true...at least until many hundreds of years have passed...until those who won the battles are dead and artifacts of historical events come to light; when records are available for study by those not involved. Even then those who have a vested interest in what grew out of the narrative written by the victors resist having the results of what artifacts sometimes reveal often influence what the narrative remains. What is amazing to me that there is always...always...somewhere beneath the accepted narrative another narrative which tells another story about what happened. It seems that there is...and always has been two realities narrated about the world in which we live. The question is which reality do we see? Which reality do we wish to live in? Which reality do we wish to become the dominant reality of our world? That is true of the narratives being told about our world today, about the narratives which have formed the basis of our world. The narrative calling for a return to that wonderful "past normal" and the one calling for there to be a "new future normal" which would be more inclusive. Our scriptures are a prime example of this dual reality. This is not a new idea. Perhaps those records of humanity found in scripture, which though some doubt seem to me to be more truthful about humanity than those more precisely recorded with exact dates and events. Dr. Walter Brueggemann has written several books about this topic illustrating the two realities through the Biblical narrative. He especially uses the metaphor about this from the Exodus story. There is the reality of the world symbolized by Pharaoh's rule in Egypt in the Exodus story. The Roman Empire forms this same function in the New Testament book of Revelation. In both of these systems the world view is one based on a scarce resources available only to the powerful few which is set against the vision given by those who speak of God's vision of a world of abundance for all...a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey and a kingdom where all are welcome with resources for all. As God leads the people through the wilderness journey in Exodus God tries to teach them trust in the abundance of the provision offered to them by the daily manna which they are to gather only sufficient amounts for the day's needs trusting the next day's will be provided. This is a thread

that is woven throughout Hebrew Scripture: God will provide for the needs if God is trusted. When trust fails; disasters happen. The historical books scripture witness to the many failures of the leaders and peoples to follow God's ways despite the many prophets sent to them; the disasters which came. God's vision is that there is enough for everyone, but only "enough" for needs, not necessarily for "desires" or hoarding. The New Testament carries the same message when Jesus comes proclaiming the kingdom or reign of God is near. Jesus teaches the same message of love for God and neighbor, of tending and caring that has been the message from the beginning promising life abundant. This message is echoed in the prayer asking for daily bread...not for lavish banquets, but daily bread...that which fulfills needs and the offers of forgiveness and acceptance for all. A vision of a world of acceptance, of abundance where all are cherished and have what is needed based on God's image in all and God's love for all. That world is set within a world represented by the "empire" as portrayed in Revelation. Or in the gospel accounts themselves by the hypocritical leaders of the Temple. In the later portions of the gospels Jesus speaks of sending his chosen disciples out as to carry the good news, as lambs among wolves. He is recorded as telling his disciples to be in the world but not of the world. Also through his ministry he is continually repeating the phrase: Do not fear. As May comes to an end, the reality of the world's vision of scarcity is very visible and dominant. The ways in which people are acting and reacting to the pandemic insisting on their "rights" over others needs; the ways people are wanting to protect the way things were "before" and ignoring what harms were happening in that "normal", the divisions existing and their causes; the ways those who wish to divide and create hostilities are growing louder. All these things speak to the reality of the world called "Empire" in the book of Revelation. But the way of the Lord is a different reality. The way of the Lord calls those who would be in the world but not of the world to look beyond those things and see the pain of those who are suffering; to look and see into the roots which have led to the suffering and try to see the image of their Lord in those faces and not to fear them. Because it is the fear caused by buying into the model of scarcity that the world is selling that creates so much of the hatred and turmoil of the world. It is trust in the Lord's provision for the needs of the world which is the balm for that fear; it is that trust which allows the fear to diminished so that people can come to know one another which will then enable friendship and perhaps even love to grow so that we can someday love one another as we have been commanded to do.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby