

Living Water: Breath, Body, Mystery

Jeremiah 2:4-13
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
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On this Labor Day weekend, we as a congregation may consider *what our work in the world is*. During times of great turbulence, conflict, fear, polarization, and unraveling, what the world needs are a few communities that are deeply rooted and grounded. Like a little bit of yeast that can leaven the whole loaf, a few communities that are deeply rooted and grounded – communities that intentionally sink themselves down into God, down into the ways of peace, justice, mercy, love, and truth – these kinds of communities will be able to offer the world *a presence* which is less anxious, less hostile, less defensive, more steady, more generous, and more attentive to pain wherever it manifests itself.

I believe that Lewinsville Presbyterian is called to be one such community.

And I believe that being this kind of a grounded, rooted community is going to require us to practice and cultivate lives of *contemplation*. Contemplation as individuals, and contemplation together as a congregation. What I have in mind with the word *contemplation* is an ongoing practice of *learning to look at the world with God's eyes*. Now, we have to be enormously modest and humble about our capacity to do this, because way too many lives and way too many churches have imploded on the arrogant and self-righteous assumption that they, and people who agreed with them, were the only ones who looked at the world with the eyes of God. So, we must be consistently humble and modest about this, and we must regularly confess our tendency to conflate our vision with God's vision.

Nevertheless, this need for us to be modest about our ability to see with the eyes of God does not let us off the hook of needing to practice learning to do it. We must practice learning to look at the world with the eyes of God.

The definition of contemplation that is at the top of the bulletin – “to take a long, loving look at the real” – grabs much of what we mean when we talk about looking at the world with God's eyes, and we can see that this definition embodies the healing, counter-cultural character of contemplation.

Contemplation takes a “long look.” Contemplation moves slowly and is very, very patient. It is not rushed, which is one of the chief characteristics of our fast-paced, frenzied culture. Contemplation, when practiced over time, will shape us into more patient people who are not in a rush.

Contemplation is a "loving look," which is to say it is not mean or contemptuous of others, even of our enemies. Contempt is surely one of the chief characteristics of our public life these days. Contemplation looks at people, looks at situations, through the eyes of love, even when it sees the sin and distortion of the world. Contemplation, when practiced over time, will soften us into being less judgmental people whose cruel and mean tendencies have been softened and worn down.

And contemplation looks at "the real." The eyes of God see us and others as we truly are. No secrets are hidden from God. That which is phony and false and untrue will, over time, evaporate in the sight of God. That which is authentic and genuine and real will endure. God's eyes see situations as they truly are, not as we wish them to be. Contemplation, when practiced over time, will build within us a fearless resolve to face and do hard things with grace.

Contemplation is a long, loving look at the real.

Jeremiah 2 shows us God's anguish over what can happen when we are not practicing contemplation. When we are not taking long, loving looks at the real, we lose our way, we get off track, we take our eyes off God, and we turn to other pursuits and idols - "worthless things," Jeremiah calls them - and then we become worthless ourselves. When we are not connecting with God, when we are not consciously, intentionally sinking ourselves down into God, Jeremiah says in verse 13, we are effectively trying to hold water in cracked cisterns, broken pots, fractured vessels that can't hold the water for long at all. When we disconnect from God and try to live life on our own, our water will run out, and our hearts and souls will run dry. And I don't know if you know what that feels like, the feeling of being thirsty in your soul, dried out, with nothing more to go on, but it is an awful way to live.

What Jeremiah is saying to us is that we do not have to live that way.

God says, "I am the fountain of living water," which is to say I will give you all the nourishment, all the guidance, all the energy, all the courage, all the strength, all the grace that you will ever need. Just turn to me. Sink your roots down into me. Look at your life and the life of your community, the life of your country, the life of your world, look at them with my eyes. Dedicate time, every day, to taking a long, loving look at the real. This will ground and root you for the things that I am calling you to do. If you don't do this, if you think you don't have time for it, if you think it's a waste of time, if you think you have too many things to do, then you should expect the water of your lives to dribble out behind you.

But as we do this, as you devote this time to taking a long, loving look at the real, we will more and more be able to be a resource to your neighborhood and your world during times of unraveling.

We're now going to take several minutes of quiet, during which I invite you to the practice of your choice. You may follow one of the practices on the bulletin insert, or another practice of your own that helps you to take a long, loving look at the real, and to see yourself or another person or a situation in the world with the eyes of God. And then we'll continue our worship after that.