

## **The Right Fight**

July 30, 2023

(Ezek 33:1-7,10-11; Ephesians 6:10-20; Matt 5:21-24) Rev. J. Koyama

Last Week was a wonderful, but also complicated week for me. The wonderful part was the wedding of Sheryl's daughter, my step-daughter Angela to her boyfriend David. It was full of promise and possibility. Their optimism and enthusiasm rubbed off on all of us, and we felt blessed in being able to share life in this amazing creation.

### **Climate Change**

What was complicated, hard to get my head around, is the way this all coincided with the latest news on climate change. As we are learning, oceans currents have shifted, releasing tremendous amounts of heat that are going to accelerate the death of reefs and marine life and ice melt at the poles. Heat records are being broken and flooding is doing great damage in many places.

And on a beautiful day like today, all that seems remote and unimportant. But that is the deceptiveness of what we are faced with. Things are clearly out of balance and it is hard not to see that there will be an alarming ripple effect and that we may be looking at massive migration patterns, as the weather makes liveable regions un-liveable.

To my mind, what is different now is that this is no longer deniable. Now it is in our faces. The unbelievable scenario that scientists have been warning us of is happening, as they predicted.

### **Two Realities Came Together at the Wedding**

These two realities - on the one hand, our little family celebration of the future we hope will unfold and, on the other, the disruptive reality of climate change, came together in a spectacular way last Friday night at the wedding rehearsal dinner.

We had a tent set up on the lawn for an after-the-rehearsal dinner with table settings and speaker system all set up and ready to go. And having just been through one big storm, several days earlier, we didn't expect another to come so quickly. The forecast was for drizzling rain that we figured the tent could easily withstand. But then the rain started and we quickly realized that it was going to be another deluge.

We rushed the tables and chairs into the house, and wiped them down with towels and set everything back up indoors. We had to wait for the catered food, because the road from Greenfield was unpassable almost immediately. But other than that, we had a cozy and enjoyable dinner, while outside the rain came down in sheets. There was so much rain

that the cars had to go through a mini-lake six inches deep to get out of the driveway.

In some ways, the rain just made the occasion more exciting and memorable. And on the wedding day itself, the sun came out and gave us wonderful weather. So we all came away feeling very happy with how it all went.

At the same time, the way these two realities came up against each other at the rehearsal dinner has stayed with me as a disturbing omen for what lies ahead. Inside the house, we were dining and sharing in the happiness of a new beginning and bright future for our daughter and future husband and the excitement of getting to know new in-laws. And outside, the rain was beating down and causing major disruptions. Inside, we celebrated our fragile human journey full of hope and promise. Outside, nature was letting us know how easily it can scuttle any of our plans.

### **How Do We Respond?**

In light of all this, another thing that I am trying to get my head around is how to respond. I think those of us who are older, are generally

responding by trying to be optimistic about the future. We don't want to burden our friends or our children with any more anxieties than they already have to deal with. We especially want our children to be able to enjoy times that are carefree and full of blessing, just as we did. And so we say very little or nothing about the storm that is brewing.

That is where the reading today from Ezekiel really speaks to me. I would say that, over the years we have been like two sentries keeping an eye on the perimeter on a foggy night. One says, "I think I see the enemy coming. Maybe we should warn everyone." The other says, "I'm pretty sure you are imagining it." A couple of minutes later, the one says, "Hey, I'm pretty sure I saw a helmet and I definitely heard some twigs snapping." The other says, "Don't worry. The fog is making you hallucinate." Suddenly a horde of enemy soldiers bursts out of the underbrush and the whole company finds itself in the heat of battle.

I think that is where we are. The enemy is now attacking with increasing force. But, the enemy in this case is not people. Our enemy is the environmental instability that has been unleashed and that needs to somehow be stabilized. And if there ever was a war that needs to be fought, I think that this is it.

Over the centuries, we have fought wars with the understanding that people on the other side need to be vanquished or eliminated in order to restore peace and order.

But the true enemy of humankind, from the point of view of the Bible, is never people. Ultimately, it has always been our own sinfulness. And the critical battle has always been the inner battle that we each must conduct to free our hearts and minds from sin and death, so that love and life can triumph. That is the battlefield on which Jesus fought and gave his life.

### **Jesus was a Warrior**

Jesus was a warrior. His weapons were the weapons of love and he gave his life using them to fight the “right fight”. I don’t think that there is any question now that we too are facing a fearsome enemy and that the most important part of winning this war will have as much to do with changing hearts and the way we understand what it means to live well, as it has to do with creating new technologies. If we are to win this war, then we have to make it the right fight against the right enemy.

It seems to me that the church’s role in all of this is to take the fight to that inner battlefield. We have to put on the “full armor of God” and ensure that we are not drawn by the powers of darkness into a fight

against each other. The right fight should be to reconcile our hearts and minds with each other and find agreement on where the true threat lies, so that we can turn together in a coordinated way and fight the battle to restore our planet, for the sake of our children and their future.

### **Sentinels**

One way I think that we can help is by being good Sentinels, as the Prophet Ezekiel urges us to be in the Old Testament Reading. Nobody wants to hear the alarm sounded or to hear that the enemy is upon us. But I believe that it is our duty, yours and mine, to be the ones in the foxhole or on the watchtower who will make the call.

I myself have downplayed the severity of what is happening. I have been uncertain, second guessing what I am seeing and so I have been a silent sentry. And so, as Ezekiel points out, the judgment may fall harshly on me.

But it seems to me that the time of uncertainty has passed. The enemy is here and we are now entering into mortal combat at our gates. And for the sake of our children and the future, we must be firm; not antagonistic toward those who disagree, and not falling for the blame

game, but firm in facing the true enemy, which is the environmental instability and its causes.

### **A Grim Message and Precious Legacy**

This is a tough message. But there is a good reason for why it is tough. It is because what we must defend is so precious.

Which one of us has not gone out on a cool dewy morning and breathed deeply of the fresh air, felt soothed by the deep green of forest, dotted with flowers and not said, “My God, this is good.” And who has not marvelled at the amazing diversity of species with which we share this earth, and not come away with a sense of wonder and praise.

The hard reality is that what we are destroying, by not addressing climate change, is so infinitely precious a gift from God, that we must not lose it. And I think that our willingness to defend this planet from ourselves and for our children and for the future is the “right fight”.