

[1] October 6, 2024

Sermon Title: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

Scripture: Psalm 8

Theme: World Communion Sunday, sharing bread with the world/neighbor.

How many times have you heard it said, “she/he has an eye for it,” or “he/she has an ear for it?” “They” have a knack for seeing or hearing something important or critical, or “music seems to come naturally to them, or art seems intuitive to them.” There is a certain lore that we have inherited that tells us that the untrained eye, or the un-tuned ear, is often better than those with years of experience. The poet William Wordsworth asks the question: “Is the child the father of the man?” (My Heart Leaps Up) and First Isaiah inspires this thought with the aspiration that, in the day of days, a “little child shall lead [us].” (Isa. 11:6) Perhaps, because children do not have the same baggage from the past that we have. Phenomenology informs us that, within any given room that we enter, we will notice some things more quickly than we do other things. Those things we are used to seeing will become almost hidden to us; new things will stand out, perhaps, or we will focus on some things more than others. Scholars tell us that how we know what we [2] know depends on what we choose to see or hear in the room of knowledge. The First Testament has an idiom for this type of seeing: *Tov-Ayin*, loosely translated “Good Eye.” So, someone might ask: “Do you have a “good eye?” Implied within this phrase: “What does your inner eye see?” The term “Tov-ayin” implies an eye for abundance instead of scarcity. In other words, do you have a generous spirit inside of you? Do you have “abundant eyes?”

Jesus asks a similar question of his disciples? “Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear?” Change the lens on your glasses! Or, “remove the log in your own eye,” before you criticize. (Matt. 7:5) Or, “Straighten your ears!” Bend or incline them, so you can hear directly, rather than at an angle. (Isa. 55:3) In a rare moment of transparency, Jesus gives thanks to God in this frustrated way:

"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." (Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21)

Jesus implies that, if we are to understand the mysteries of the Kin[g]dom of God, we must become child-like, being born-again, from above, in the Spirit of Grace and Truth. The truth is that children can see, speak and hear at a level we cannot. Undiminished by life’s disappointments and failures, their senses are fresh with

discovery and curiosity. Children are the universal language of the soul; they call out our best selves. One of the finest aspirations comes from Malachi 4:6 that God will turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents.”

In Matthew’s account of the events leading up to the Cross, after Jesus overturns the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple, two things happen. The blind and lame come forward to Jesus to be healed and the children begin to sing “Hosanna, to the Son of David.” This makes the religious authorities in the Temple furious. “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked Jesus. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

[3] Jesus is quoting from Psalm 8, from our scripture for today. Yet, on the surface of things, you would not know it. Underneath the text, something is going on. Yes, in my mind, that something is that one of the scribes misplaced a comma in the Psalm. Many of the current versions of the Bible place comma in a different place yielding the translation: (8:2)

“From the mouth of babes and infants You have founded a bulwark.” (NRSV)
“From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength.” (ASV)

Certainly this is as true a statement as the one Jesus quotes, but I like Jesus’ translation of Psalm 8 better than the current versions. It makes more sense to me. Placing the comma in a different place, we have the translation: (8:1b)

“Your Glory, O God, is sung above the heavens from the mouths of infants and children.”

In the Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21, a poem recites how Wisdom delivered the people of God from a nation of oppressors, becoming a shelter to them by day and a starry flame by night, bringing them through the Red Sea and the deep waters, and then ends with the words: “Wisdom opened the mouths of those who were mute and made the tongues of infants speak clearly.”

Putting it together, Psalm 8 would then begin as follows:

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Your Glory, O God, is sung above the heavens from the mouths of infants and children.”

[4] Are you old enough to remember a Song entitled “We are the World” written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie recorded on January 28, 1985. It sold over

800,000 copies in just three days (20 million over all) and raised over \$60 million for African famine relief. Those of you who are younger may have heard it in more recent years. It was called “Live Aid” or “USA for Africa.” It was broadcast across the world via satellite, one of the largest, according to sources, some 40% of the global population witnessed it.

“We are the world, we are the children, We are the ones who make a brighter day
So let's start giving, There's a choice we're making, We're saving our own lives, It's
true we'll make a better day, Just you and me.”

Imagine with me, if you will, over 150,000 children from 65 different countries around the world, in 2017, singing the same song on the International Day of Peace, the song beginning on the shores of New Zealand and ending on the shores of Hawaii 24 hours later.

Let there be peace on earth, And let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth,
The peace that was meant to be. With God as our Father. Brothers, sisters, all are
we.

Let me walk with my brother, my sister, in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me, Let this be the moment now. With ev'ry step I take, Let
this be my solemn vow; To take each moment and live, Each moment in peace
eternally. Let there be peace on earth, And let it begin with me.

[5] Nothing sells like children singing! If we are to have peace, it will be because the children have brought us to it in spite of ourselves getting in the way. Another hymn I have seen capture our best imaginations is “We are marching in the Light of God (Siyahamba),” which is a Zulu folk song transcribed into a Christian hymn by Andries Van Tonder in 1952. Walking, singing, dancing, praying, marching: each has a stanza of the hymn (#442 in our Chalice Hymnal). Popular in the 1990s, children’s groups often went on tour to sing and perform it. It may on occasion end with “We are standing in the light of peace.”

The slogan phrase “think globally, act locally” has been around since the 1970s; it has evolved into “act globally, act locally” in the more modern era. It was originally coined with reference to considering the impact of local actions on the environment, and still has that “feel” to it. It has also been fielded within activist circles to suggest that acting locally is the best way to accomplish more of a global impact on world problems, poverty, hunger, drought, over-population, slavery, war, colonialism, and others. It is hard to get a handle on world problems as large as these; so start small and work up. The problems seem less impossible and local

solutions might scale well to the larger realms. The ambiguity of life, as Paul Tillich puts it, is more manageable in the local neighborhood. Start by teaching the children, and the adults will follow over time, so the theory presented itself as a workable model. Nothing is worse than not being able to see the results of your work. Acting locally puts a face on the problem and the success. Publishing success stories gets more donations and buy-in.

For several years, I volunteered as team coordinator for the annual IBM charity drive. Each employee could pre-register a charity of their choice (501c3) to put on the list of charities in the annual drive or simply give to one already on the list. Being on the list IBM-wide meant that the specific charity was almost guaranteed to have a good amount of donations at the end of the annual drive. It was such a positive feeling each year to know that you accomplished something for your charity. And IBM would match your donations in some cases. And then, there was IBM-day, when our local employees picked a volunteer site, and all the local employees would show up and work together to accomplish something for the community. This was in lieu of going in to work at IBM, so a work-day was dedicated to this. Of course, as a brand, IBM got some good advertising on this day. Collaborating together on a problem gets you much further than working by yourself. IBM is only one example of what is done at many different companies, indeed Tinker Air Force Base has the same type of practice each year for their charity drives. I know this because I was also involved as a volunteer there. These practices are often hidden from public view, although they need not be. They encourage us in how much we can accomplish together.

[6] At times like these, with extensive multi-state disasters that come from hurricanes like Hurricane Helene, we remember that planning that goes into Church World Service Kits that are pre-stored in warehouses waiting for the next disaster. Funding and collecting for these emergency kits is a form of pre-giving that gives forward to the next disaster. We store away kits in good times for use in bad times, or at least that is the idea. Yet, our best planning usually cannot keep up with the tremendous need. You can keep up with where the buckets/kits/blankets go on the CWS website. It is a way of “thinking and acting” globally with local giving. I know they were a big help during the recent flooding in Nebraska; emergency kits were stored near to the need in Lincoln, Nebraska, to more quickly get them where they were needed. They form a way of “thinking and acting locally.” The Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the UCC would match bucket for bucket our local giving for CWS emergency kits, extending our giving even further beyond the local level.

Bread for the World is a non-profit organization that mobilizes Christians to speak up for hunger and justice issues. It was founded in 1974 to advocate for ways to end hunger, specifically federal legislation that can address the causes of hunger around the world, to think globally and act locally. They gather and publish global hunger statistics so that others have these resources on hand to speak to the global need.

One of the models for servanthood in the early church is that of the under-rowers under the deck of the ship; they get the job done without much, if any, fanfare. They are the Baruch servants who give of themselves unceremoniously. Another model of servanthood that is more well-known is the one who waits on tables, but even this model has the image of one who fills your glass when you are not looking. I think these may be the models Martin Luther considered when he wrote the words: "Give and expect nothing in return." For we do not give in order to put others under obligation to us, but instead to increase their viability. This ties to the Prophet's reward mentioned in the Gospels.

So, as we come to break the bread, thinking globally of all those who break the bread with us today, as we break the bread locally with the global spirit of love and peace surrounding us, we find in our communion a synergy greater than the sum of our partaking. We have a blessing which creates for us a dynamo of spiritual power that sends us into the world to feed the hungry and fight the good fight for justice in our land. Let us see the world with the eye of abundance to meet the world's great need. Alleluia! Amen.