

A Sermon By Rev. Jim Hickman
Corona United Methodist Church
May 16, 2010

The Lord of History Is Still Here
Psalm 67, especially verse 4

May the nations be glad and sing for joy,
For You rule the people justly
And guide the nations of the earth.
Psalm 67:4

...You rule the people justly
And guide the nations of the earth.

We don't believe that. We don't believe that God rules or guides the nations of the earth. No, we gladly embrace a concept of separation of church and state; we join the Western Culture in general in whittling God's power or presence down to a personal thing—a matter of personal prayer and concerns. Oh, we act as if God is *really* concerned about abortion or immigrant rights or homosexuality or child abuse; but we don't really expect God to *do* anything about it. He leaves that up to us. We don't believe that

God rules the people...
And guides the nations of the earth...

Do we really think we need the government's approval to meet at a flag pole and have prayer? Do we think that a Day of prayer is affectively only if the press covered it and it is on the news tonight at 6pm? Do we really think God can't do anything without our help, you know,

God has no other hands nor feet than ours...?

Is God unable to act independently of us? Can't God act through people even if they are not aware of his acting through them? Is the great God Almighty nothing more than a personal deity that listens to our prayers and has no concerns nor power beyond the immediate things in life? Is our God that small? I don't think so.

In the Bible there is a concept of God as the Lord of History. Psalm 67 refers to this concept when it says,

May the nations be glad...
For God rules the people justly
And guides the nations of the earth.

But the concept is also found in the prophets. I love Isaiah's image of how God whistles for foreign nations to come and do his work (Isaiah 5:26). It is found in the story of Exodus where God heard the cries of his people and called Moses to lead them out of Egypt. God made David king over Israel and called him up short for his immorality.

The Bible teaches that

God acts in the real world,
sometimes with our help,
sometimes in spite of us,
sometime totally independent of us.

We are correct when we say that God gives us freedom and expects us to work out a lot of the issues of our times using what he has taught us. But it is a mistake to think then God withdraws and doesn't do anything unless we cooperate in the venture. As I read the Bible and as I watch how God works in the world I have become convinced that sometimes God works in and through people that don't have the foggiest idea that God doing what he is doing. We have just read the story of the arrest of Jesus in the Gospel According to John. John records that the High Priest made an interesting statement to the religious leaders at the time. John writes,

...Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You people don't have any sense at all! Don't you know it is better for one person to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed?" [Then John adds] Caiaphas did not say this on his own. As High Priest that year he was prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation...[and] not...just for the Jewish nation. He would die to bring together all of God's scattered people. John 11:50-52 *The Contemporary English Version*

God spoke through Caiaphas and Caiaphas didn't even see the significance of what he was saying. It is the story of a person who thought he was doing one thing and actually did/said something else—something far more profound on behalf of the Lord of History.

This same independence on God's part is the reason Christianity has not died in The Soviet Union or China or Cuba no matter how hard the social order has worked to eradicate religion. I read an article in one of the magazines I take about how Harvard University doing its best to root our religion from their curriculum—they want a rational scientific point of view to prevail. And I smile knowing that no matter how hard they try, they won't succeed. God/The Lord of History is still here.

Part of my understanding of this concept comes from the Bible Studies I have led over the years in the *Book of Revelation*. One of the things that book teaches is there are times in history when God says, "Enough!" I have had enough!" I like Bill Cosby's way of saying this in his retelling of the story of Noah,

Enough. I have had enough of you people.
Come on, everybody out of the pool.
Come on...

But in the *Book of Revelation* it is serious business. Personally I think I have seen God The Lord of History has said "Enough" three times in history:

In the period right before the American Civil War.

In the 1930s and 40s in Nazi Germany. As someone said in class last week, "The Nazi should have been successful. But some where God said "stop right there" and their war machine began grinding to a halt.

And finally, in the 1940s and 50s in the Civil Rights movement.

The book of Revelation teaches me that you don't really want to be around when God says "enough" because the line is drawn in the sand and judgment is clear. It doesn't matter that the Sheriff in Selma, Al was a good Methodist and a Sunday School teacher. When he stood on the bridge that day facing Dr. Martin Luther King he was on the wrong side of the line. He was facing the God who says,

"I am marching on; Glory, Glory Halleluiah...
I am marching on..."

I know that some of you are uneasy with my point of view. I sounds like I believe in a theocracy—you know, the belief that many religions have including many modern Muslims that God should be acknowledged as ruler of the nation and rule through His/Her/its clergy. I wouldn't say I believe in that kind of government. But I do believe God can rule—can influence what governments do with or without their agreement. God does rule.

And I want to challenge you who are uneasy with the idea I am presenting this morning. I would like to ask:

- Is God so small or powerless that God is dependent upon human beings to accomplish anything at all?
- Can't God act independently of humans? In fact, isn't God a player in history whether we agree to his involvement or not?
- Does God "come around" to our point of view just because we have discussed it thoroughly and taken votes in our big secular or religious assemblies? Does God really care what we think if what we think is wrong?

A ramification of what I am saying is we need to keep our upcoming elections in prayer. We ought to pray for the issues and those who are in or are running for office. We ought to be listening for God's prompting on some of the issues. On some of them God will leave us to decide, but in some we need to listen so we can be of service to God. Not because God is some puny little God that needs our help but because God is the Lord of History. Life would be better if we cooperated with God instead of ignoring Him. That is the point of the closing lines of Psalm 67:

Then the land will yield its harvest

And God, our God will bless us... vss. 6-7a.

The Lord of History is still with us.

Let us take a few minutes to reflect on what we've heard and seen this morning.
Amen.