

“Seeking God’s Will”
The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 18
10 September 2023
Trinity+St.Peter’s Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California

Ezekiel 33:7-11
Psalm 119:33-40
Romans 13:8-14
Saint Matthew 18:15-20

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Idea 1: What does it mean to be prophetic?

I have mentioned to you in previous musings from this pulpit the need for us to be a prophetic church, one that speaks for God’s will and presence in the present. It is a glib comment that is common in our time, a comment that comes from preachers my age, or some younger. It is a comment that comes easily off the lips, but it is a goal that is not so easily accomplished. Yet there is the call. In the call to Ezekiel, we hear these words, given to him, and given to us as well, *“Son of humanity, I have appointed you a sentinel for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall warn them for me.”* It is not just Ezekiel’s task, but it is a task shared by all the prophets – the Isaiahs, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea – all of them. And it is shared with us as well, this being a sentinel that announces God’ will. Oh, by the way, that is the title for this sermon – “Seeking God’s Will” and I hope this will outline some steps we need to take as individuals, and as the Church in this endeavor.

If we go to the first part of this reading from Ezekiel 33, we have words from God describing what God sees the sentinel doing – warning the people about what is to come. That is, I’m afraid, what so many in the churches think that they are doing, warning women, warning gay people, warning the immigrant, warning children warning the homeless and the poor. Where, I wonder, is the warning for the wealthy, or for husbands, for politicians, for those who have sinned against the body politic? Perhaps we need to begin by being a sentinel who gives a warning to ourselves, to seek out God’s will, and to strive to walk in God’s way.

Idea 2: Pursuing God’s Law (Psalm 119)

The pursuit of God’s will begins quite simply, especially as described in the Psalm for this morning, *“Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; I shall keep it with all my heart.”* Jesus renders it even more simply when he teaches the young lawyer about doing God’s will, namely, to Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and loving your neighbor as you love yourself. Three simple objects of our love – God, neighbor, and self. In our pursuit of God’s will we need to follow a lesson

taught a couple of Sundays ago by Isaiah – that we look and listen. The psalm makes it clear: *“Incline my heart to your decrees and not to unjust gain. Turn my eyes from watching what is worthless; give me life in your ways.”* Unjust gain is a clear enough warning to our own time, but the call to look and to see is something that we all are capable of. We are called to see, and then to warn, having pursued God’s will and knowing what it is that God expects of us.

Idea 3: Fulfilling the Law with Love

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, makes it clear what Ezekiel and the Psalm have hinted at. *“Owe no one anything, except to love one another.”* And then later in the reading: *“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.”* In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke shares with us what others saw in the church – *“See how they love one another.”* The difficulty for so many in our society is the ability to recognize who our neighbor is. For Jesus, it was anyone with whom he came into contact. Saint, sinner, righteous and generous, tax collector and spendthrift, child, woman, mother, one taken in illness – thief on a cross. Jesus saw them all as neighbor.

Idea 4: Binding and Releasing as God would have it.

And now we come to the really difficult part. Remember that we are called to be sentinels, prophets who give warning. In loving ourselves and in loving our neighbor we often are called to give a warning. There is an elaborate process that is outlined in Matthew. First there is giving the warning to someone who has lost their way. Should they not listen to you, or see what you are warning them about, then take others whose job is to help you issue the warning.

I am a conflict avoider. I find these directions frightening, and I follow along with much of society in avoiding such warnings, such confrontations. However, the warnings that I think that I (and perhaps you as well) are called to announce are warnings to our leaders in society and government. Discern the poor, discern those who cheat, discern the greed of our society, look, listen, and see. In the 20th chapter of John, in a post resurrection appearance, Jesus breaths on his disciples, anoints them with his Spirit and says to them. *“Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain, they are retained.”* I am moved by the forgiveness clause, but I think that we must declare the forgiveness to those that we have warned.

What do I want you to go home with today? First, that love is the fulfillment of the law. Second, that we are called to love God and God’s will for us. Second, that we are called to love our neighbor – regardless. And finally, that we are called to love our selves, because it is that love that enables us to be sentinels of God’s grace. As Jean Luc Picard would say, *“Make it so.”*

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