

Our Needs Are Holy To God:
The Need For Security
Micah 4: 1-4 Matthew 23:37, Psalm 23

6/7/2020

I was reading recently the new biography of Theodor Geisel, *Becoming Dr. Seuss*. I discovered that he counseled writers of children's books to try to address at least *one* of the seven need of children as they wrote. The seven were: 1) a need for security; 2) a need to belong; 3) a need to love and be loved; 4) a need to achieve; 5) a need to know; 6) a need for aesthetic satisfaction; and 7) a need for change.

My mind started turning. These are not just children's needs; they are all our needs through all our lives. They are the needs of the child within us all. I thought, why not preach on these needs during our Season of Grace? Then, why not use children's stories, some by Dr. Seuss in the services? And how perfect that our Season of Grace offering is going to the Boys and Girls Club of Statesville who is at work trying to meet the needs of our children during the pandemic! So here we go!

The theme of the season is: Our Needs Are Holy to God. The schedule:

June 7: The Need for Security

June 14: the Need to Love and Be Loved

June 21: The Need to Belong

June 28: The Need to Achieve- On this Sunday we will honor our graduates and students of all ages

July 5: The Need to Know

July 12: The Need for Beauty

July 19: The Need to Change and Grow

So today, The Need for Security. For children, teens, and adults of all ages, and for the community in which we live. Our needs are holy to God. Sometimes we shy away from our needs and even try to hide them. The word “needy” is a negative word. But God doesn’t think so. Our needs are holy to God. God comes to meet our needs and God appoints people like us to help meet these needs.

As I began to think about security the word safety came first to mind. And then, because of the terrible times in which we live, the safety of people of color, young and older. We know of the “talk” parents of black children have to have with their children about how to conduct themselves in public so to avoid the dangers of racial violence. It takes my breath away, but not the same as George Floyd dying, crying out “I can’t breathe”, as the policeman’s knee was on his neck.

II

The first text that came to my mind was Micah 4:1-4. The words echo the words of Isaiah which we often read during Advent: People flowing up God’s holy mountain, hearing God’s wisdom, swords beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, and they would “learn war no more.” Then the last words that went straight to my heart:

...they shall sit under their own vines and fig trees....and *no one shall make them afraid.*

Someone has counted the number of times in the Bible God says to us: “Be not afraid”. 365 times! One for each day of the year! We need to hear that every day, don’t we?

But more than just the words, we need the *reality* of it every day, the *conditions* which shield us from fear.

In 1941 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered one of his most important speeches to Congress and the American people. We were not yet at war, but it was drawing closer. He outlined what

he called “The Four Freedoms”: The Freedom of Speech and Expression; The Freedom of Worship; The Freedom from Want; and the Freedom from Fear. And he meant these not only for our nation but for all nations.

Norman Rockwell painted a picture for Freedom from Fear: two parents tucking their children safely into bed at night. We would wish something like this for all children. A child needs to feel safe, be safe.

But the *Freedom from Want* goes hand in hand with the Freedom from Fear. The famous psychologist Maslow developed what he called our “hierarchy of needs”. It is pictured as a triangle with the most basic needs at the bottom. He theorized that the most basic needs need to be met first before we proceed to the next level of needs. Guess what the most basic need was, even before the need for security and safety? Our *Physiological needs: food, water, warmth, and rest*. Freedom from Want sets the stage for growth to the next stage, the need for safety and security.

III

Our needs are holy to God, and physiological needs come first. God’s commands in the Hebrew scriptures had to do with meeting these needs, and with special regard for the most vulnerable in the society: widows orphans and strangers, or immigrants. For example, there was the command to leave extra grain and other foods unharvested so that the most vulnerable could come and “glean” from the fields and have enough to eat. That’s how Ruth and her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, were able to make it.

And in the gospels Jesus came meeting our needs because our needs were holy to God. He fed the hungry multitudes, he healed the sick, he gathered children to himself lifting up their esteem before others.

And he reminded us that God is calling us to do the holy work of caring for the hungry, thirsty, sick, unclothed, the immigrant and prisoner.

So we are back to the needs of children and us all, the need for food, water, warmth and rest, security and safety.

IV

This is the calling of parents, and the importance of family. To provide food and water, warmth and rest, safety and security. And we provide for our children's spiritual and emotional needs for safety and security too. Tucking them in at night, reading to them, listening and talking with them, holding them close.

So too the church as the family of faith: welcoming children, cherishing them, delighting in them, creating a safe place for them to be and to grow.

And what of other's children? The Islamic version of the golden rule is beautiful to me: "A person does not have faith unless they love for their neighbor what they love for themselves." So, support for public schools and for teachers and staff is an important way to provide safety and security, especially in a day when public support for public schools is on the decline. Here children are taught, loved, fed. For some children, this is the safest place they know.

And so also for ministries like I.C.M. and Fifth Street, that help children, parents and adults be free from want and free from fear. Where people can have a safe place to spend the night and have food on the table.

V

We have these needs for security and safety as adults too, don't we. Some moment of stress or crisis comes, and suddenly we feel like a child again, afraid again, unsafe again, unsure again. Have

you ever wanted to go home, get in bed, pull the covers over your head and stay there for a while? I have.

If a person has not had these basic needs met in their home and with their parents, they have less resilience when times of stress or crisis come. There are too few deep reservoirs of safety and security. And even more so when they have suffered abuse.

I was given the grace of parents who provided for me, held me, who tucked me in at night sometimes rubbing my back as I went to sleep. So when I heard the words from scripture: “The Eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms”, my spirit felt resonance with those words.

No matter what our experiences while young were, we all have our places of vulnerability and insecurity. Church is a place where we can love one another in our places of vulnerability and insecurity.

VI

And let us keep Statesville in mind, where too many children go to bed hungry at night, go to school afraid, who live with more fear and insecurity than we can imagine. Their needs are holy too, and we can be God’s help to them. We can work together to make Statesville a better place for more of our children.

There is a scene in Matthew’s gospel, near the end of Jesus’ life. Jerusalem was in more trouble than it wanted to admit or address. Jesus would soon be killed as a public scapegoat of their fears and troubles. Scapegoating a person or group of persons is a particularly vicious and virulent form of human evil, and it goes on all the time.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said,

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that stones the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often have I desired to

gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. And you were not willing.

Here is the Motherhood of God at work, seeking to give shelter and safety to all her children. Our needs are holy to God. Come, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers and join in this holy work of God.

VII

The passage of scripture that expresses most that our needs are holy to God is our most beloved psalm, Psalm 23. Perhaps that is why we love it so much. God our Shepherd comes to us, to feed, to guide, to protect, to walk with us in our scariest places and to surround us with goodness and mercy.

There are hundreds of hymns and anthems based on this psalm. Isaac Watts, the father of English hymnody, composed three versions of this psalm in three different musical settings. My favorite is this, “My Shepherd Will Supply My Need.” Here is the last verse:

The sure provisions of my God
attend me all my days.
Oh, may thy house be my abode
and all my work be praise.
There would I find a settled rest
while others go and come;
no more a stranger or a guest,
but like a child at home.

You can sing that at my funeral! Or, any day!