

FCCS March 18, 2018

Rev. Curran Reichert

“Besieged”

Our little family took a quick trip up to the snow the early part of this week, thankfully right before the big blizzards in Tahoe. For the past six years we have met up with a couple, who has a daughter the same age as Ellie, at a little place called Sorenson’s in Hope Valley.

One thing I particularly love about this place is that it comes with sleds for the little girls, and a big mountain trail for the adults to climb. I love to crunch through the freshly fallen snow high above the sounds of the road where all you can hear are the screeches of the hawks circling, and the melting ice as it cascades through the branches.

The trail marches right up to the borderline of Desolation Wilderness, and each year I like to hike to the marker that designates the transition into that new territory. I guess I appreciate the metaphor, hiking right to the edge of desolation.

This year, however, the snow was too soft and it wasn’t possible to get as high up the trail as I would have liked without snow shoes. I was disappointed, this path has always worked for me in the past. But new circumstances, require different strategies, so I had to adjust and veer off to explore a different face of the trail.

The way I see it, scripture this morning is pointing to a similar experience. The Israelites and God had been going along their journey together enjoying the view, when all of the sudden the landscape changed- not the external, but the internal landscape.

In this case the Israelites became distracted with worldly things, as humans do, and God had some recalculating to do to get their attention. Was God happy about it- no- but recalculating is a part of life, right?

God decided it was not enough for humanity to recognize God outside of itself, what would really make the difference is when human beings could recognize God as standard equipment on the inside of every self.

I don't know if God recalled those early humans for manufacturer error, but the re-released humans were new and improved; each came standard equipped with the Godself.

The text this morning offers assurance that no matter the external experiences we encounter- we (the new and improved humans) can always rest into the center of God that is inside of each of us, because the Holy One has from the moment of our birth been inscribed on the doorposts of our hearts.

*"God says: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know God," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." Jeremiah 31:31-34*

To know self is to know God, to know God is to know self. (John Calvin) God is an internal as much as an external reality- that is what we are talking about this morning. Ok, so what difference does that make?

The poet David Whyte wrote an essay on the word, "Besieged," I want to spend a little time with that idea. David was one of the presenters at the event with Krista Tippet that I attended a few weekends back, and it was wonderful to hear him in person as a longtime admirer of his work.

On a walk up to the cafeteria I had a chance to visit with him for a few moments. I told him I wanted to explore his essay with you all during Lent, but that I wanted to be sure to get the message right, and could he give me the one-minute version of "Besieged"? I'll tell you what he said after I give you the long version.

The article begins, "Besieged, is how most people feel most of the time: by events, by people, by all the necessities of providing, parenting or participating and even and most especially by the creative possibilities they have set in motion themselves.

To feel crowded, set upon, blocked by circumstances, in defeat or victory, has been an abiding dynamic of individual life since the dawn of human consciousness.

In a human life there is no escape from commitment: retreat to a desert island and the lonely islander will draw up a Robinson Crusoe list to make the place habitable or begin building a raft to escape; tell everyone to go away and they hang around wanting to know why. Earn a great deal of money to gain individual freedom and a whole world moves in for a share of the harvest.

If the world will not go away then the great discipline seems to be the ability to make an identity that can live in the midst of everything without feeling beset.”<sup>1</sup>

How do we live in the world besieged as we are, without feeling beset?

I wonder if it has something to do with understanding that God has taken up residence within us. The goal of that Godself being to help us find a ground upon which we are safe to stand, even when the earth around us is shifting.

Whyte suggests that our ability to “come to ground,” is centered in our perception of agency. Are we the captains of our own ship, do we feel we are allowed to order our days and if so how do we order and re-order them until they feel right?

How do we prioritize from a place of freedom as if allowed to enter the world for the first time, every time?

Whyte says, besieged as we are- is it little wonder that we vacillate between fantasies a world in which we are totally separate and then in our loneliness of being set apart long to be wanted again.

“Besieged or left alone, we seem to live best at the crossroad between irretrievable aloneness and irretrievable belonging, and even better, as a conversation between the two where no choice is available. We are both; other people will never go away and aloneness is both possible and necessary.”

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<sup>1</sup> Resourced From ‘BESIEGED’ in CONSOLATIONS: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words. © David Whyte & Many Rivers Press

In order not feel beset, we have to be able to access the ground of our being, to touch the Godself inside; the rock that both is us and more than us, and in which we have infinite trust, flexibility and freedom.

Finding the Godself inside is what allows us to be both besieged and beautiful. The Godself inside is the place we stand when our feet are sore.

David's one-minute version was exactly this, there will never be the perfect moment to be yourself, so find your ground in the midst of the imperfect and see the world as a place to which you belong, rather than as an enemy laying siege to your version of perfection.

Beloved, may the presence of our God be inscribed on the doorposts of our hearts as an ever-present reminder of the holy covenant between God and all people.

May the God inside each of us, serve as a reminder of the Holy ground upon which we stand. Feast or famine, besieged or beset, may we know the place inside each of us that is solid ground.

Amen.