

April 22 Message

My next 2 messages are from the book
“When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough” by Harold Kushner

Who's Afraid of the Fear of God?

I can picture Ecclesiastes as a man growing older, desperately sensing that he is beginning to run out of time, too honest to repress or deny his fears and gripped by the sense that he will soon come to the end without ever having done something meaningful with his life. To be sure, he has been rich and his life has been a pleasant one, but those are such transient things. Riches can disappear in one's own lifetime or slip from one's grasp at death. Rich people can be obnoxious, lonely, sick. And all those moments of pleasure disappear as soon as they are over. In the end, he knows that he will have to face the darkness alone, without either his wealth or his pastimes to protect him. And if he will be asked, by himself or someone else,

“What did you do with your life, with all the opportunities and advantages you had?”

What will he answer? That he made a lot of money, read a lot of books, and went to a lot of parties? A person's life should add up to more than that.

Ecclesiastes at this point in his life is wise and well read, learned enough to know that there is no answer in all of his learning to the question that haunts him. One day, he will write a book to try to and answer it. But before he can do that, he has one more path to pursue. Desperate to do something with his life which will not only be successful and pleasant but *right* in an enduring sense, he leaps beyond the limits of knowledge and understanding, trying to reach the far shore where reason cannot lead him. Growing older and more frustrated daily, Ecclesiastes, like many people as they grow older, turns to religion. From now on, there will be no doubting or questioning.

Ecclesiastes will devote himself wholeheartedly to the service of God
and the doing of His will.

Maybe he was just too old to change the critical, skeptical habits of a lifetime. But whatever the reason, we soon find him saying, “Do not be overeager to go to the House of God”. It was probably not his fault that he did not find what he sought and needed in religion, and it was certainly not God's fault that Ecclesiastes turned to religion looking for the wrong things. The fault, if there was any, may have been in the nature of religion as it was understood back then.

This is the way most people in Ecclesiastes' day understood religion:

"If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments, I will grant you rains in their season...you shall eat your your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land...But if you do not obey Me and do not observe all these commandments,...I will wreak misery upon you, consumption and fever. You shall sow your seed to no purpose for your enemies shall eat it." Leviticus: 26

In the Bible, there is no word for "religion." The concept is too abstract. The phrase closest in meaning to it is "the fear of God." What do those words "the fear of God" mean to you? Do they conjure up the picture of an all-powerful authority living in heaven and thundering His will down to us, ready to smite us if we disobey? Do they make you think of a God who knows your every secret thought and deed, and will punish you if you do wrong ("putting the fear of God in you")? If so, then you are like a lot of people today and throughout the ages, whose understanding of religion has been based on fear of punishment. Religion becomes a matter of God's commanding and our obeying and being rewarded. Or else disobeying and being punished.

And this is why Ecclesiastes could find no satisfaction when he tried to make religion the cornerstone of his life. He may have been sufficiently ahead of his time to sense that a life of obedience based on fear was not what he was searching for.

More next week about the notion of "following the rules" and "obedience".
LUV 2 ALL! ML

Today is EARTH DAY!

The 2020 theme for Earth day is "Climate Action".

In 1970 Congress authorized the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the passage of the Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species Act. As a result, Americans began honoring Earth Day on April 22, every year.

So why don't you Google it, do some research and find out how you can make a difference, make some changes; be good stewards of our earth!

*We are all tied together in a single garment
of destiny, an inescapable network of mutuality.
-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*