

## Proper 14 - Changing the Trajectory

Sunday, 7 August 2016

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

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### Accident Reports

- When I read the Book of Isaiah I often get the same queasy, uncomfortable feeling I used to get when I was obliged to read aircraft accident reports when I was a pilot in the Air Force
    - As you read aircraft accident reports, you read this with a certain amount of dread. You already know that things will not turn out good.
    - In the report the accident investigation team retraces the the events that led to the pilot putting himself in this position, and there typically is one event that—had the pilot, or crew chief or air traffic controller did something different—that would have prevented the accident.
      - It is that event, when you're reading it, you say to yourself, "Oh my God, why did he do this?" ...and had he not done that, this accident would never have happened.
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### The Book of Isaiah as an Accident Report

- The Book of Isaiah is much like an accident report.
  - We already know, as we read it, that things did not turn out good for the Kingdom of Judah
    - And we already know the setting for the accident: the Kingdom of Judah was caught in the middle of a big geopolitical conflict between the Empires to the North and South.
- But Isaiah, as a real accident investigator, drills down and exposes the real root cause of the disaster that was the Kingdom of Judah...
  - The downfall of the people of Judah came because they believed they could bribe God to overlook their sins if they offered burnt offerings to God of lambs, and goats, and burned costly incense and held lots of festivals in God's honor.
  - Isaiah quickly disabuses them of this belief.

- The real cause of the accident that's about to happen is not because of bad liturgy
  - That's only a sideshow
- The real cause of the accident that's about to happen is because Judah and its rulers and its citizens are ignoring the poor.
  - "Cease to do evil," Isaiah says, "learn to do good." Not in making perfect sacrifices on the altar. No; "learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow..."
  - Eugene Peterson: "Work for justice. Help the down-and-out. Stand up for the homeless. Go to bat for the defenseless."

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### Who are the Defenseless in Anacortes?

- Searching out for the defenseless is the particular job of deacons in the Episcopal Church.
  - Bishop Greg: Many of you have heard me say I believe deacons are called to go into the world, find trouble, and bring it back to the church..
    - :You might think of it this way: if our tribe, as catholic Christians, has anything close to a scout, a deacon would be it. A scout was sent out ahead to check things out, to assess the lay of the land, to bring back the news to the rest and then lead them all back to whatever, whomever and wherever the need or danger. Deacons are our scouts."
- Fortunately for us at Christ Church (& Celebration Lutheran & many other churches in Anacortes), there are lots of other scouts who look and find trouble. We have scouts who have found Trouble in the form of:
  - Respite care for adults with dementia
  - Need for a hospice house
  - Lack of summer education for migrant kids
  - Lack of infant care for single parents just coming out of the Family Center
- I've been thinking about this in terms of my role as the chairperson of two community service committees: the Kiwanis Community Services & Christ Church Community Support.

- What are we doing for the defenseless in Anacortes and around the world?
  - Let's talk about money:
    - Jesus talks about it in the Gospel lesson for today; so let's talk about \$\$ & cents
    - In addition to scholarships and world-wide projects, the Noon Kiwanis Club donates around \$90K per year to community services; Christ Church does about \$40-\$50K per year.
  - Many of that community outreach we and the Kiwanis do are for the same projects: Food Banks; Family Center; Boys and Girls Club; Fidalgo Dance Works and their Parkinson's Program; Meals on Wheels, Gentry House; Teen Clinic and Prenatal Care Clinics; Oasis Teen Shelter
- Over the years we committee members have been asked to go out and find where the other needs are in Anacortes to which we can contribute
  - And over the years, we typically end up supporting the same programs we have for years, with a few other add-ons come and go
- In terms of Isaiah and Accident Reports, I've often wondered if we could do better job in our committees if we were to find something like the one significant thing that contributes to the trouble in Anacortes and put a significant amount of our funding into that
- In the past year, I've had a couple of conversations that have provided some significant roadsigns to that One Significant Thing:
  - The first was a conversation with Chief Bonnie Bowers, who stated that there is one major consistent factor that determines if a young person or adult is going to be involved with the criminal justice system in a bad way:
    - All you have to do is answer the question: when that child was in the third grade, could that child read at the third grade level.
      - Because 2-out-of-3 children that can't read a grade level in the 3rd Grade will either end up on welfare or in jail, or both
      - There are states who predict their future prison population based on 3rd grade literacy scores.
  - The second was an observation by Dr. Mark Wenzel that children who can read at grade level in the 3rd Grade are 4X more likely to graduate from high school

- if a child is not reading at grade level by third grade:
  - their chances of staying on grade level is decreased
  - their likelihood of being absent increases,
  - their being suspended from school increases
  - their likelihood of dropping out of school increases
  - their likelihood of graduating from high school decrease
  - the likelihood of going to college decreases and going to jail increases!
- There are school districts that have paid \$10,000 per child to retain them in 3rd grade until they reach reading level, not to mention costs of summer school and other last-minute remediation.
- The third observation came from Bill Gates, Sr., in a speech at a District Convention:
  - Praised the YCPO program and Kiwanis efforts in early learning because every \$1 spent on early learning saves \$8 later on.

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### How Big is the Problem of Reading at Grade in Anacortes?

- Each year about 200 kids enter kindergarten in Anacortes
  - If their parents earn less than \$24-\$30K year, then those children are funded to go to preschool through the Head Start program. ( Minimum wage for a year = \$21K)
    - Right now there are only 10-12 kids who fall outside the Head Start guidelines and whose parents cannot afford to send them to preschool
      - The cost of that: ½ day = \$2,500; full time = \$5,000 per year.
    - Therefore 12 kids X \$5K per year = \$60,000 per year
- \$60,000 per year. Now we're talking real money. Where do we find that?
  - In addition to the funds spent on Community Services, the Kiwanis Club provides \$40-\$50K each year on scholarships at about \$3K per scholarship.
  - However, it's a given that many of these kids will go to college, one way another.
    - For some, a scholarship might be the make/break deal that determines if they can go on to college

- But for many, a scholarship will not change the trajectory of their lives...they will get a college degree one way or another
  - On the other hand, \$2,500 - \$5,000 given to a four-year-old would certainly be more impactful...this would change the trajectory of their lives from one of absences, failure and delinquency to one of being a productive member of society.
  - If we can change in the trajectory of the life of a four-year-old, we can have a major impact
    - But if we don't get to them at a young age, they won't have much chance to be on any track for a better life.
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### So What Can We Do?

- That's where I need your help.
- If I were the Deacon King of Anacortes, I would set aside a significant part of our Community Services funds and pool those with a goodly portion of the scholarship fund and Community Services funds of the Kiwanis Clubs and the Soroptimist Clubs and
  - I would make a community commitment that any three-or-four-year old should have the opportunity to go to preschool, and that we, as a community, are going to guarantee that every three-or-four-year-old has that opportunity.
- At the same time, I know there are other opportunities out there where we also could change the trajectory of kid's lives:
  - Diane Canington is teamed up with others in Anacortes to establish an infant care facility here
  - Rev. Carol has been working for a number of years in putting together summer schooling programs for migrant kids in Skagit Valley.
- These are all great programs that can change the trajectory of children's lives.
  - Perhaps these are the kinds of programs we should focus on in our outreach to the community.

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## An Invitation

- I invite you
  - think about those opportunities we have to change the trajectories of people's lives
    - and let me know about these programs
  - Better yet, don't just tell me.
    - I invite you to sit on the Community Support Committee;
    - and, rather than just OK the programs that we've supported in the past,
    - perhaps you would like to help us find those Trajectory Projects
  - Right now, we only meet once a year, in November to look at all the requests we have for grants,
  - But I'm thinking that we might become more proactive
- Above all, I am thankful to everyone (and that's most of this congregation) who works at the Red Door Thrift Shop,
- By that work, I believe that we are blessed by God, we bless each other and we bless the community.
- Today's Scriptures from Isaiah is abundantly clear:
  - From Isaiah we learn that we love God by being obedient, by doing what God wants us to do.
    - And what God wants most from us is to work for justice.
    - The Reading of Hebrews reminds us that Faith is a verb, a thing *done*.
      - It is not a feeling or even an idea or a creed.
      - Faith is something we *do*—a manner of behavior toward ourselves, others, the earth and its creatures.
  - Yes, we must bless God through our words and prayers and hymns of praise;
    - But we also must bless God in the words we speak to one another, and in the deeds of justice and peace that we perform in God's world.