



Session Four

An Act of Imagination

Imagine all the people living life in peace...

-- "Imagine" by John Lennon

Orientation Text: Psalm 73

1 Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;

my steps had nearly slipped.

3 For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For they have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek.

5 They are not in trouble as others are; they are not plagued like other people.

6 Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them like a garment.

7 Their eyes swell out with fatness; their hearts overflow with follies.

8 They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression.

9 They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth.

10 Therefore the people turn and praise them, and find no fault in them.

11 And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

12 Such are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

13 All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

14 For all day long I have been plagued, and am punished every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will talk on in this way," I would have been untrue to the circle of your children.

16 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

17 until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end.

18 Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.

19 How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!

20 They are like a dream when one awakes; on awaking you despise their phantoms.

21 When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart,

22 I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast toward you.

23 Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.

24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor.

25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

27 Indeed, those who are far from you will perish; you put an end to those who are false to you.

28 But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, to tell of all your works.

Active Listening:

Pits of our stomachs

Rat-race after school...

Overview:

1. Where does Pharaoh show up now? In technological, therapeutic, military consumerism. We live in a Pharaonic society marked by conformity and isolated individualism that is legitimated by idolatry for which there is no longer any maintenance for a public fabric.
2. To move out of that box of coercion is the way of the cross -- which is the regular giving of our lives away for the sake of the neighborhood; to act against the ideology of Pharaoh and Caesar and to enact a world of bread and forgiveness and healing and homecoming.
3. Psalm 73: a parable about departing the faith for a life of commodities.
4. Conclusions:
 - a. The box of Pharaoh's conformity is powerful and seductive.
 - b. The box of Pharaoh's production and consumption is not absolute.
 - c. "Neighborhood" is a choosable alternative.
 - d. The movement from the box of Pharaoh to the neighborhood of Sinai is a common crisis for liberals and conservatives -- and *nobody* has high moral ground.

Questions:

1. Name some of the categories that would help people see what is "systemically at stake."
2. How can acts of feeding and healing and caring be part of the problem?
3. What part does liturgy play in furthering the resistance to the Pharaonic system?
4. What is "committing a wilderness act"?
5. Explain the tension between commodity and communion.
6. Talk through how liberals and conservatives might work together on one of the issues suggested by Brueggemann.

Your Personal Strategy to Counter Pharaoh:

Brueggemann suggests several ideas for countering Pharaoh in this session. Name one discipline that you will commit to between now and your next meeting that will counter your Pharaoh.

