



Session Five

On not doing God any favors

I will accept no bull from your house...

-- Psalm 50.9 (Standard Version)

Orientation Texts: Psalm 50

7 "Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. 8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. 9 I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds. 10 For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. 12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. 13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? 14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. 15 Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Deuteronomy 6

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Active Listening:

Shemah

Bi-lateral intimacy

Sour with exploitation

Overview:

1. God is not in need of what we have, not open to bribery or flattery or any manipulation. God does not want or need or permit worshipers to do any favors for the almighty.

2. The people of the Exodus and the people around Jesus are living “life after death.” People who are given a second life do not need to be cautious and grudging and guarded and narrow. Our task is to grow in gratitude -- in our failure, emptiness, and despair, we were as good as dead. We are living a second life
3. Psalm 50 traces out two ways of worship and two ways of life. The self-seeking who promote their own well-being, engage in violent assaults on the neighborhood, and imagine that God is as greedy for stuff as are they. But God says, don’t do me any favors. Don’t bring that stuff because you think it will do me good so that I will do you good. The self-giving, unlike the self-seeking, act in generosity without seeking payback.

Questions:

1. Brueggemann suggests that Psalm 50 refers not to one “bad apple” but to a destructive system with social power, social ideology, and social discourse that is organized against the hope of our being truly human. Explain.
2. How is Brueggemann’s “Society of Death” different than the “Culture of Death” decried by some conservative theological groups?
3. According to Brueggemann, what is the “work of God’s people?”
4. What does thanksgiving have to do with the solution?
5. Brueggemann suggests that we are already living “life after death.” Explain.
6. In what ways can we transform our culture from one of greed to gratitude?

Your Personal Strategy to Counter Pharaoh:

Brueggemann suggests several ideas for countering Pharaoh in this session. Name one discipline that you will commit to for a set period of time from this final session. Consider taking on one of the disciplines you’ve experimented with for a longer period of time. Pick a partner with whom you can be accountable for the period of time you agree to.