

October 18 and 19, Sun Prairie UMC

“Faithful Living, Generous Giving: Ministry of Presence”

Sermon by dave werner

[Note to Gentle Reader: Since I preach from notes and not a full text, what you see here is more of a summary than a sermon text. Bad news: you miss all the inspired impromptu remarks. Good news: it's a quicker “read” than “listen” I imagine. Shalom! dave]

Have you heard of the cartoon pastor The Rev. Will B. Dunn? Well ... Gladys was the preacher's wife and accompanied her husband each Sunday to church. One particular Sunday when the sermon seemed to go on forever, many in the congregation fell asleep. After the service, to be sociable, she walked up to a very sleepy looking gentleman. In an attempt to revive him from his stupor, she extended her hand in greeting, and said, **“Hello, I'm Gladys Dunn.”** To which the gentleman replied, **“You're not the only one!”**

Sermonwork: Write the letters in caps from left to right:

G O D I S N O W H E R E

How do you see reality, and what can you do about it?

I'm here

- To praise you and thank you!
- To challenge you!

Psalm 24: the earth is God's! All of it! All of us! We are living in chaotic times (but when are “times” NOT chaotic?)

Our society needs groups like this congregation to step up and model a way of life that offers abundant life for all—not things and such, but joy and hope and care. Susan reminded us last week of this verse: *“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”* –Luke 12.48b

It is never truer than now!

Thank you for “being Church” here in Sun Prairie through

- Logos (feeding 250; using every avail. space)
- Working program of caring for parishioners
- Music groups

- Mission trips near and far
- Mission support near and far
- Sunday School and study groups
- Sat. and Sun. schedule!
- and others which you must name for yourself.

Here's the challenge: to continue and increase in your faithfulness! WHY? Because, from the last sermon series, we understand that there is power in partnership—partnership with God and with one another.

In the Exodus passage

- Moses wants certainty about God's presence because God's presence is unique to Hebrew self-understanding.
- God assures Moses of divine presence, but
- God protects Moses from seeing the face of God because we cannot stand the brightness!
- So they play peek-a-boo (a phrase from Walter Brueggemann) in the Rock of Ages, cleft for Moses and us to signal God's presence.

How do we sense God's presence?

- Scripture and stories from our tradition
- Seasons and sunrise/sunset
- Babies bringing new life
- Smiles sustaining us this moment
- Our God-given capacity to care for creation!

Yet in this encounter there remains a hiddenness, a potentiality for the future. We are not told that Moses did in fact see the back of God! There remains a tension. And like Paul in the Corinthian letters, we understand that even as NT people, we continue to see in a "mirror, dimly" but it is enough.

The challenge to stewardship comes in a chaotic and uncertain time, but we have all the assurance we need of God's companionship with us.

A pastor (Marilyn MacDonald, from etalk) writes:

*I remember there used to be, in many homes, a plaque that read, 'Thou, God, **seest me.**' This used to terrify me as a child. When I asked my mother about it, though, she said, 'Yes, God does see you all the time. God loves you so much (he) can't keep his eyes off of you!'*

God has a ministry of presence with us now, here.

How shall we respond?

1. We shall remain a present ministry; we shall continue to maintain a ministry of presence in this place, as ambassadors for Christ.
2. That will necessitate using our gifts:
 - Time and energy
 - Gifts and graces (talents and skills)
 - And, yes, our financial resources too,

For as the Matthew passage teaches,

- Everything belongs to God.
- We use the gifts God gives us for necessary things, like the taxes and all the rest.

Interestingly enough, John Wesley spoke to this matter way back when:

John Wesley's sermon on the Use of Money: *"I say unto you, Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into the everlasting habitations."* Luke 16:9

I. We ought to gain all we can gain but this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of life, nor at the expense of our health.

II. Do not throw the precious talent into the sea.

III. Having, First, gained all you can, and, Secondly saved all you can, Then "give all you can."

<http://new.gbqm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/50/>

3. But a number of us will reply, "Times are hard; we don't have money to give to the church as much as we would like to!"
 - Response #1: Try! Start regular giving from the first fruits (off the top, not the bottom)
 - Response #2: This congregation/The UMC needs more gifts than money!
 - Volunteers for Logos and Sun. School and nursery care
 - Musicians
 - Folks to offer loving care
 - Handypeople
 - Persons with special business skills

Our ministry of presence with our neighbors is strengthened by God's ministry of presence with us, and the creative energy within this divine

and human presence ministry gives meaning and direction to our efforts to serve Creation in the name of the Christ.

The Baal Shem Tov, great leader of Hasidic Jews, once said:

“If we were to walk in the woods and a spring appeared just when we became thirsty, we would call it a miracle. And if on a second walk, if we became thirsty at just that point again, and again the spring appeared, we would remark on the coincidence. But if that spring were there always, we would take it for granted and cease to notice it. Yet is that not more miraculous still?”

Isn't the miracle that sustains us the presence of God? And the consequent companionship of church friends?

G O D I S N O W H E R E

How do you see reality, and what can you do about it?

“God is nowhere” or “God is now here.”

“Faithful Living, Generous Giving!”

- Not in our own strength
- But because **God is now here.**
- “If not us, then who?”
- If not now, then when?”