

“Warning” Sermon

September 10, 2017 - Ezek33:7-11,
Romans 13:8-14, Matthew 18:15-17

Jeremiah 37:17

17 Then King Zedekiah sent for him and had him brought to the palace, where he asked him privately, “Is there any word from the Lord?”

“Yes,” Jeremiah replied, “you will be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon.”

If I had a hammer

I'd hammer in the morning

I'd hammer in the evening

All over this land

I'd hammer out danger

I'd hammer out a warning

I'd hammer out love between

My brothers and my sisters

All over this land, uh

Peter, Paul and Mary [The trio was composed of tenor Peter Yarrow, baritone Noel Paul Stookey and alto Mary Travers, 1962].

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When Lee Hayes and Pete Seeger wrote the “Hammer Song” for Peter, Paul and Mary, they were writing to a nation in turmoil as Black Americans demanded the rights of full US Citizens, it became evident that our government was involved in successful and unsuccessful attempts to assassinate foreign leaders in Africa, Asia, Guatemala and now Cuba. As citizens, we began to question the wisdom of our growing presence in Vietnam.

The song focused first on the hammer, because it wanted to emphasize that “warning” and protest is not about destroying but about building. The hammer represented a new construction. The song concluded: “If you’ve got a hammer, if you’ve got a bell or if you’ve got a song-its time to hammer out justice, it’s time to ring for freedom, and it’s time to sing a song of love between us all.

This song was a warning for what was to come. The following year the President of the United States was shot and killed in Dallas, Texas. This was a great depressing blow to many of us. But for many it was also a call for the hammer to pound out justice even harder, the bell to ring for freedom even louder, and the song of love to grow as many joined in protest to the reality of what our nation had become.

Ezekiel reminds us in 33:7, that God has made his people “watchmen” for the purpose of speaking “warning.” It is not our responsibility to turn the wicked around. We are not responsible for what happens if we warn and they do not heed. We are responsible to pray for them if they do not heed, but again we are responsible to also warn. It is not something added on to the Gospel, it is the Gospel to watch and to warn. The sixth verse has already warned us,

If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned... his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

God will judge us for not warning. God is holding us accountable for silence. God does not hold us accountable if we warn in the face of evil, but God decrees that we in fact participate in evil when we are silent in the face of evil.

We warn out of love. The Apostle Paul taught that we should owe no one. Our silence puts us in debt to the wicked and makes us owe them as co-conspirators with them. We do not owe the wicked our silence. But verse 8 of Romans thirteen teaches us, we do owe them our love. We demonstrate love by warning our nation of evil, warning our family members of evil, and we also by warning our each other in the church when evil emerges among us.

Love between our brothers and sisters all over this land is our learning to love our neighbors as ourselves. If I love you I want the best for you. If I love you I will work with you, instruct you, prepare you, guide you, so that you will enjoy the blessed life I have found in putting my absolute trust in Christ as Lord.

Our churches are weak when evil goes unchecked in them. If evil exists anywhere in the church, Jesus taught that it is time for some

one-on-ones. We don't allow certain kinds of words to be used about each other as God's church. We don't allow certain jokes to pass between each other in God's church. We don't listen silently to malicious gossip in God's church. In the church, because of our history of koinonia, of mutual sharing and experience, we get to know one another well enough to know when something is wrong.

Paul warned in Galatians 5:9, that "a little yeast works through a whole batch of dough." He likened silence in the face of evil to having "turned from obeying the truth." So often we are silent because we want to in our words, "keep the peace." But are we keeping the peace when we fail to warn in the face of evil?

The Epistle to the Hebrews (12:14-15) warns us-

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God, and that no root of bitterness grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

In the church as in the home, those one-on-ones are invaluable. Usually that is where it ends, unless the evil has already taken on roots and ensnared other plants in God's garden. Never fear, warning is God's command. Warning is God's solution. Warning is God's way of bringing and maintaining peace and freedom and

justice and life and love. If we love, if we care, if Christ is Lord of our lives, then we will also warn. Amen.