

Christian Theology and the Anxious, Angry Male

Sermon Preached in The Mackey Worship Center

The Rev. Dr. Carroll C. Meyer, Preaching

February 25, 2007

The First Sunday in Advent

Westminster Presbyterian Church

353 East Pine Street, Wooster, Ohio, 44691

Matthew 3: 1 – 12

Matthew 11: 20 – 24

409 Wild and lone the prophet's voice

246 By The Babylonian Waters

If you have not figured it out yet, I have chosen to preach on some very hard subjects in an attempt to appropriate our Christian faith to the new generation of Americans. Just a few weeks ago I preached a sermon on the subject: The God of the Bible I reject. Last week I preached a sermon on Faith and Sexuality in the 21st Century. Each of those sermons looked at Biblical material you rarely or never hear used for preaching. This morning continues the theme of appropriating difficult Biblical texts to the contemporary generation.

This morning's scripture lessons used to begin the Lenten season present two men, believed by Christians and Moslems alike, to represent two of the most spiritual persons to have ever lived. These lessons present Jesus and John the Baptist as two very anxious and angry young men. And the Bible introduces them in that light for good reason. John the Baptist and Jesus, second cousins, were both executed by the state government of their time for preaching prophetically against the evils of those in power. It would do well for us to remember that ultimately they were proven right and forty years after their execution the government they tried to reform collapsed. Three hundred years later, their lives would take precedence throughout the Roman Empire. While we have a long history of picturing Jesus as a meek and mild, holy little child, let us remember these lessons for the day that present Jesus in a very different manner, a prophetic manner that got him executed. Jesus and John were executed because they confronted the powerful of their time for their injustices against the poor and the outcast. Today we have among the American populace a large number of men and

women in our society that are also angry and anxious and protesting in their own way. We need to hear their voices. There was the emancipation movement for blacks. There was the movement for women's suffrage. There is an ongoing movement for the equalization of rights for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons. We need to move our attention to the felt condition of the marginalized men of our society.

Bill Moyers, in an article titled, "For America's Sake," published in the January 22, 2007, issue of *The Nation*, lets us know that he is another religious and very anxious and angry man. He tells us why. "Here is the real political story, the one most politicians won't even acknowledge: the reality of the anonymous, disquieting daily struggle of ordinary people, including the most marginalized and vulnerable Americans but also the young workers and elders and parents, families and communities, searching for dignity and fairness against long odds in a cruel market world. Everywhere you turn you'll find people who believe they have been written out of the story. Every where you turn there's a sense of insecurity grounded in a gnawing fear that freedom in America has come to mean the freedom of the rich to get richer even as millions of Americans are dumped from the Dream." We live in the United States of three hundred million people. Just 1 %, or 3 million of us have more assets than the bottom two hundred and seventy million. That has a lot of people anxious and angry.

I want for you to hear a piece of music that you will not like, but just hold your ears and hear it. This song was listened to by more white males in the United States in ten weeks who paid to get in to hear it than there are Presbyterians in the entire United States. ISIS SGNL 05 track 2 Divine Mother - The Tower Crumbles. If we are to speak to this generation, and you and I and God know we are not attracting their attention, then the desperate reality toward which this music points us must be acknowledged by us and in compassion we must respond.

I want now to speak of the alienation, privatization, isolation and desperation this music represents and follow that by an appropriate response from Biblical theology.

I. Alienation: What is alienation and how does it separate me from my reality and make me anxious and angry? Let me give you two examples: 1. When I was a teenager I could manage my physical world. I could take our television apart and fix it. I still remember the tubes that maintained the

vertical hold pattern on the screen in an RCA victor console TV. It was a 6SN7 vertical hold vacuum tube. A teenager can not fix a TV set today. When I was nineteen I could completely tear apart and put back together again every part of a car. Then, when I bought a 1968 Saab with an electronic fuel injector and a primitive computer system I realized that I could no longer either understand or make every part. My car became alien to me. That inability to understand and manage and control our physical surroundings has been occurring in all our realities. 2. We have become isolated from our community. That has been well documented in the book, Bowling Alone. You walk across campus and people no longer speak to you or even nod. They are talking on a cell phone implanted in one ear and an iPod in the other. Ken McNeil, our new custodian, is on a one man crusade to speak to and have students speak to him. 3. We have become indoctrinated to believe we are privatized, unassociated economic units instead of being a family and community of interrelated human beings. Every individual must now have his or her own investment counselor and private retirement account, private health insurance and private retirement-home account. Those corporate elements that maintained the fabric of our society, that gave a sense of social security to our society, are fast fading: job security, unions, pension funds, company health insurance, close knit family and church to name are few. 4. And I want to introduce a theme that I personally think is wonderful but in its introduction and development is very hard to manage, that is, thinking internationally. We now have vigilantes on the border with Mexico shooting Hispanics trying to cross the border. And some of you heard the news this past Friday morning regarding the game being played by the Young Republican Club of New York University called, 'Find the Immigrant'. We have a new Islamaphobia going on in our country. And when you call to have your computer fixed you will usually end up talking with someone in India. I now have a new friend in Palestine and in what was the former East Germany. This new internationalism to me feels wonderful. But for those who can not quite make it in our economic system, this *'Invasion of the Work Snatchers'* dooms them to the equivalent of an American Siberia. Bill Moyers says this has created a very large segment of the populace that has a *'deep insecurity grounded in a gnawing fear.'*

This world of alienation, isolation, privatization, and desperation seethes and steams just under the surface of our society and it makes the society fragile and vulnerable. Jesus and John the Baptists' ministry was to the marginalized of their society so that the powerful hated them and the poor

loved them.

Bill Moyers says we must confront the most fundamental progressive failure of the current era: “the failure to embrace a moral vision of America based on the transcendent faith that human beings are more than the sum of their material appetites, our country is more than an economic machine, and freedom is not license but responsibility – the gift we have received and the legacy we must bequeath.” “Freedom is not license but responsibility – the gift we have received and the legacy we must bequeath.”

The operative story for our country right now is that every American citizen must become a private, capitalist entrepreneur. As a member of the library board and working with the Noble Foundation, I have worked to have a significant section of the library and library materials devoted to resourcing individuals in their entrepreneurial pursuits. There are tens of millions of dollars now being directed toward the OARDC for developing businesses out of their research. This is an essential requirement. And success in the business venture brings its own material and psychological rewards. But there is another story that must also be operative in our collective values. And I make no apologies for being repetitive on the subject. This other story says that the shoe maker who makes good shoes has every bit as much value as the entrepreneur who makes dollars. A little story is appropriate here. When I left Steubenville and moved to Princeton for graduate school, I observed quite a number of different social policies. For example: in Steubenville people carry jumper cables in their pickup trucks. In Princeton people carry AAA cards in their wallets. We are moving into a society in which the vast majority of people have neither jumper cables nor AAA cards. That example illustrates the sermon in a sentence. But the case to be made is more than that. It is not just a matter of having a social safety net in place for those who do not earn a livable wage. We know that in Jesus’ time there were the outcasts and untouchables. Our country has been a democracy of the people and for the common man, without nobility and aristocracy. In our country we are in the process of creating not just a permanent underclass but more than that, we are beginning to put negative, qualitative value judgments on a large segment of our population. So it is alienation, isolation, privatization and then there is this element of degradation that results in desperation and resignation.

We have two ministries facing us in this regard. First, we have the ministry of preaching and teaching the good news that every human being has

ultimate value because every human being is a child of God. And second, we have the prophetic ministry of public critique that demands an ethical social fabric for meeting the basic needs of our society.