

The Current Context of Worship Requires Articulation and Engagement

When I first became a parish minister some people said they didn't want to hear about what was happening in the world when they came to worship. There are folks still saying that today.

Some worshipers are doubtless seeking needed refuge and relief, sanctuary from troubles that beset them daily. The worship community may be the one place where they are not beaten up and beaten down by life's heavy demands.

To these worshipers it must be said, what happens in the larger world relates closely to what happens closer to home. Just as individuals who are abused must gain the courage to tell their stories in order to move toward healing, worshiping communities must have the courage to articulate the political and social evils that afflict their people to help them move beyond acquiescence to active resistance and redress.

However, many other worshipers doubtless come seeking insulation and absolution from their complicity in a predatory society where they reap numerous benefits at the expense of others. The worship community may be where they hope to find peace of mind and self-justification.

To this latter and sizeable group it must be said, to paraphrase a First Testament prophet, "Woe to those who are at ease in America! Woe to those who lie on sleep-comfort beds and lounge on their decks, eating their fill of sirloin and lamb and drinking vintage wines, who sing idle songs while entertaining themselves, and who pamper themselves with needless extravagance, but are not grieved at the ruination of our physical, societal, and spiritual environments. They shall be the first to pay the price for complacency and excess, and their indulgences shall pass away" [Amos 6:1-7].

Any religious leader worth her salt knows that the challenge of ministry requires that the afflicted be comforted, but also that the comfortable be afflicted. This is no easy task, especially now that we are governed by leaders who seem hellbent on afflicting the afflicted and comforting the comfortable. Granted, some of the afflicted across our land have felt validated and encouraged by our new president, but his deeds belie his words. He and his allies have, to paraphrase another First Testament prophet, "healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace. They have acted shamelessly, yet they were not ashamed" [Jer. 6:14, 15]

Without social, political, and economic justice – no greatness, no peace!

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