

THE OLYMPIC NEWS

The Monthly Newsletter of the Olympic View Community Church of the Brethren
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April 2008

Living the Word

by Ken Miller Rieman

...they have made offerings to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hand.

Jeremiah 1.16.

I still have fond childhood memories of the sermon my father preached about Jeremiah. For the occasion, he crafted new words to the popular song "Jeremiah was a bullfrog," by Three Dog Night. He taught the youth of the church the words and we all stood up one Sunday and belted out "Jeremiah was a prophet..." It's funny. I can't remember any of the other words to that song just now, but I never forgot what Jeremiah was called by God to become; namely, one who tells people things they don't really want to hear.

In recent weeks, another Jeremiah has been taking heat in the public square, mostly because he happens to have been the preacher of someone who seeks to become our next president. There are times when preachers are called upon as pastors to comfort the afflicted and times when they are called as prophets to afflict the comfortable. From my vantage point, The Reverend Jeremiah Wright Jr. has done his share of both. But I'm not here to cast judgment upon him. I'm

more concerned about the way I've been hearing people speak about the proper relationship between preachers and politicians, or between faith and politics.

As one who makes his living treading the line between the pastoral and the prophetic, I become uneasy when I hear people speak as though they have it all figured out. Those who stand up in public and lift their voice to a matter of common concern do so at great risk. Not least among these risks is the probability that those who dislike their approach will try to demonize them.

The prophet Jeremiah was just a youth, but God touched his mouth, and gave him the words by which God might warn the people to change their course. In his own day, Jesus himself was called upon to pronounce God's judgment upon those who wrapped themselves up in the appearance and rhetoric of the Torah/scripture and used it to shield themselves from examination while pointing at others as the cause of God's anger and the people's suffering. Jesus, like the prophets, even went so far as to curse the religious leaders and politicians of his day.

So where does this leave us today? Unfortunately, we have failed to learn the lessons of

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history. Like the people of Israel in Jeremiah's day, we resist the more difficult task of examining our own faithfulness to God's teaching, and prefer to impugn the loyalty of those who dare to speak critically of our government rather than deal with the substance of their critique.

We see preachers who try to sidestep this risk by preaching things that people like to hear. We see churches that try to avoid these dangers by focusing on what makes people comfortable and confident about the way they live.

I think a more faithful response is to resist the temptation to lionize or demonize personalities. In our faith, we are called to be faithful above all else to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Preacher Jim Wallis said it well. In our public life, the Christian is called, neither to be the master of the state, nor to be its servant, but rather to be its conscience.

In good conscience, then, I hope we can extend a spirit of grace, listening, and learning toward those who seek to honestly engage the most difficult of issues, even when they come down in places different than we. And I hope we can recommit ourselves to being the kind of church which patiently sits down to sort through our disagreements until we find the common ground upon which this world's change must be built.

It is said that in crisis, we find both danger and opportunity. As we observe the reticence of many to bring their ears or voices to the public conversation table because they can't stomach the ugly spirit which leads people to attack others, we can also understand why churches have come to be viewed by so many as places where they might be judged or even attacked.

These people are hungry to find communities where they can ask hard questions, and not have to have 'all the right answers' and still be on a journey of discovery, healing, and growth with people who will love them anyway.

Danger and opportunity. Prophets call it both ways.

Gift of the Heart Kit Challenge!

...*Because little things mean a lot.*

Church World Service kits provide essential supplies to disaster survivors around the world. School Kits are most needed at this time.

Let's see if we can surpass our goal of collecting 5,000 kits this year at Annual Conference! Don't forget to drop off your kits at the Brethren Disaster Ministries booth.

To assemble a School Kit you need:

- One pair of blunt scissors (rounded tip)
- Three 70-count spiral or tape-bound pads of 8" x 10-1/2" ruled paper or pads with 200-210 sheets of ruled paper. (Please do not provide loose-leaf or filler paper.)
- One 30-centimeter ruler (12")
- One hand-held pencil sharpener
- One large eraser
- Six new pencils with erasers
- One box of 24 crayons (only 24)
- One 12" x 14" to 14" x 16" finished size cotton cloth bag with cloth handles

Pack all items inside the cloth bag.

Please include \$2 per Kit for processing/shipping cost.

For more information, log on to: www.churchworldservice.org/kits



A young Angolan is happy with his School Kit.

