

I come in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In seminary, I was taught to preach with a bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other, in order to keep God's Word and Truth relevant. Amidst the noise of the media, I found some profound wisdom in children's prayers. Joyce prays, "Dear God, thank you for the baby brother, but what I asked for was a puppy. You can look it up." Or how about Nancy - "I bet it's hard for you to love all the whole world. There are four people in our family and I can never do it." These children recognized that God works in unexpected ways, and that loving can be hard. Most importantly, they recognized that God is bigger than they are.

How big is your God? It is a tough question. Any attempt to describe God limits Him. If God is all-powerful, can He be weak or vulnerable? If God is forgiving and merciful, how does He render justice? My use of male pronouns limits God to having traits associated with gender. Yet, without these attributes, it would be impossible to even begin to imagine how big God might be.

I am told to trust in the bigness of Almighty God, which means giving up control, and relying on His providence and love, without worrying about the outcome. That's unpredictable! So, rather than trusting in an incomprehensible God, I reduce Him to a micro-God, a **God that is made in my own image**, assuring me that my self-interests will be satisfied. Replacing Almighty God with a micro-

God permits me to become judge, and to realign world views in my favor, and limiting His actions in creation. A micro-God does not get in my way.

Last week, Ann shared what it costs to be a disciple. It costs everything - to be ALL in. The disciple of a micro-God, to be all in, sings the praises of Almighty God, and proclaims His wisdom, justice, and might, while at the same time, turns the bible from a book of divinely inspired writings into a weapon that destroys freedom, dignity, and love. Under the disguise of divine worship that glorifies and praises the wonder, and awe of God's redeeming actions in creation, the disciple of a micro-God leads a pep-rally for the home team. The sacred traditions that draw the faithful together in joy and unity in the love of Almighty God, are replaced with rites and practices that condemn and expel those considered to be unworthy.

In an article by John Pavlovitz, he writes: "These disciples need to be armed because they don't really believe Almighty God will come through to defend them in a pinch. They want to change gay couples and transgender teenagers themselves, because they don't trust God to work within people as He desires. They want to horde wealth, health insurance, and opportunity because Almighty God can't provide enough for everyone." Walls are needed to keep refugees out because God isn't generous or creative enough to help them figure out how to welcome and care for everyone who requires it." The disciples of a micro-God take the steering wheel away from Almighty God for fear that he would "drive

them outside of their gated communities and into the hood and ask them to get out and care for the people they're so used to condemning.”

These words sting, but it is **the reality in which we are living**. Read the headlines! Pay attention! The messages of love, inclusiveness, forgiveness, justice, and mercy, are being distorted into messages of hate, unworthiness, division, and intolerance – all in the name of Christianity. These corrosive attitudes are seeping into the hearts, minds, and souls of so many, and are being exploited religiously and pushed into politics.

I assure you that this is not a political statement in any way, but rather a call to defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to restore God to His rightful place as the Almighty. This means to trust in Him, trust in His love, and rely on His providence, to listen for His Word. We must not forget that God is love, and if it is not about love, then it is not about God (Presiding Bishop Michael Curry).

Everyone creates micro-Gods from time to time by turning our backs on God, and put ourselves first. We purposely stray away from God's love, and rely on our own providence. Even as we worship our micro-Gods, Jesus, in His mercy, pursues our heart, mind, and soul in order to forgive us, and invite us to turn back to Him. Jesus will not give up on us, ever.

In Exodus, the Israelites decided that the God of Abraham wasn't doing His job, so they created a micro-God, the golden calf. They could then worship on

their own terms. They violated the most sacred of all of the Commandments: You shall have no other gods before me. Even though the Israelites committed the most grievous of sins, God did not condemn them, but stayed with them in hope of redemption. God was bigger than any sin, selfishness or idols!

In Paul's letter to Timothy, he acknowledged that he was among the most grievous sinners, a professional Christian hitman, an oppressor extraordinaire, a blasphemer. Jesus did not give up on Paul, but pursued him. He persisted until Paul was courageous enough to turn away from sin and to face Jesus. God is bigger than any hate or persecution.

In our Gospel today, the Jewish leadership grumbled about Jesus hanging around with sinners, and EATING with them. Sharing a meal was a sign of inclusion and hospitality. One did not eat with just anybody! But Jesus ate with those considered unworthy. He invited and pursued those castoffs, never gave up on them, or condemned them. He always left room for repentance. Even in his suffering and death, Jesus pursued souls – Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Jesus is bigger than hate, marginalization, or even death.

So what? Even with the current assault on Christianity, this is Good News! And bad news! First the good news. You can trust in the bigness of Almighty God – God is bigger than anything the world can dish out – even a direct assault on Him! And for you, you are assured that no matter what you have done, or will ever

do, God will never love you less, and will unceasingly pursue you, to bring you back. Our bulletin cover shows Jesus carrying a black sheep. He unceasingly pursues the black sheep to bring them back into the fold – it could be you!

Now for the bad news, which is also good news. There is a long list of people who have committed grievous sins throughout history. Did Jesus pursue Pontius Pilate? Probably. What about Adolf Hitler or the 9/11 terrorists? Yeah, Jesus pursues them, too. And murderers, rapists, and abusers. Jesus pursues them, all of them, in **hope** of bringing them back into the fold, into the Kingdom of Heaven. This is hard to accept – seems unfair, but it's ok – it's not our job. And **THAT IS THE POINT!** It is not up to us to decide how God should do His job. It is not up to us to limit God's work in creation. We must trust that God is so big, so loving, so merciful, so forgiving, so just, that He'll will make all things right. After all, He is God! We do not need micro-Gods! God will always provide in ways that are best for us – even if we grumble.

Our **job is** to preserve the bigness of God as the Almighty, and follow Him – all in. Rather than being armed with weapons, we are called to be armed with the Gospel. Our words, attitudes, and actions must break the chains of small-mindedness and selfishness, freeing God to be God – a God of love without limits. So, may our words, attitudes, and actions answer Charlene's prayer. "Dear God, how did you know you were God? Who told you?" Amen.