

Stanwood United Methodist Church  
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Deja Vu (all over again)

(Dream or event that makes you feel that you have experienced something before in your life; the experience of thinking that a new situation has occurred before.)

Recently I read a book titled "Night" by Elie Wiesel, who survived the Holocaust in Europe and has become a well-known author, if winning the Nobel Peace Prize makes one well know. I begin today with a fairly long quote from his book.

(quote)

They called him Moishe the Beadle. It was 1941 in Europe.

And then, one day all foreign Jews were expelled from Sighet, Transylvania. And Moishe the Beadle was a foreigner.

Crammed into cattle cars by the Hungarian police, they cried silently. Standing on the station platform, we too were crying. The train disappeared over the horizon; all that was left was thick, dirty smoke.

Behind me, someone said, sighing, "What do you expect? That's war..."

The deportees were quickly forgotten. A few days after they left, it was rumored that they were in Galicia, working, and even that they were content with their fate.

Days went by. Then weeks and months. Life was normal again. A calm, reassuring wind blew through our homes. The shopkeepers were doing good business, the students lived among their books, and the children played in the streets.

One day, as I was about to enter the synagogue, I saw Moishe the Beadle sitting on a bench near the entrance.

He told me what had happened to him and his companions. The train with the deportees had crossed the Hungarian border and, once in Polish territory, they had been taken by the Gestapo. The train had stopped. The Jews were ordered to get off and onto waiting trucks. The trucks headed toward a forest. There everybody was ordered to get out. They were forced to dig huge trenches. When they had finished their work, the men from the Gestapo began theirs. Without passion or haste, they shot their prisoners, who were forced to approach the trench one by one and offer their necks...This took place in the Galician forest, near Kolomay. How had he, Moishe the Beadle, been able to escape? By a miracle. He was wounded in the leg and left for dead...

Day after day, night after night, he went from one Jewish house to the next, telling his story and that of Malka, the young girl who lay dying for three days, and that of Tobie, the tailor who begged to die before his sons were killed.

Moishe was not the same. The joy in his eyes was gone. He no longer sang. He no longer mentioned either God or Kabbalah. He spoke only of what he had seen. But people not only refused to believe his tales, they refused to listen.

They refused to listen.

(end of quotation)

Why did they refuse to listen?

Why is that part of the human experience? When voices were raised about the war in Vietnam, there was tremendous pressure for critics to be silent. Support the troops by being silent. Be patriotic by being silent.

When a mother raises her voice in dissent about Iraq, her motives are questioned. Has she gone insane? Her marriage ends. She finally gives up. Or has she? Cindy Lee Sheehan just announced (July 9, 2007) that she would run for political office if certain things did not happen. She must have just taken a few weeks "off". She wants to be a member of The Congress. She will not be elected. She has broken too many rules. Be silent.

When the people became aware of my dissent for the war in Vietnam, I remember clearly one phone call from a doctor's wife, questioning both my right to dissent and my knowledge of the facts. She urged me to trust Congress in its oversight of the war. The Senators knew the facts.

I was perplexed and I shared my perplexion with her. How can I trust my Senators? One is for the war and one is against it. Which one is right?

It is déjà vu time all over again, as people are protesting the war in Iraq and there are still those who say that criticizing the war is an act of treason. There are still those who suggest that the only way to support the military personnel is to support the waging of war. The United Methodist Church has some real concerns about the use of war in today's world. War is not a very useful tool in the conduct of human relationships today. Our United Methodist Social Principles contains this sentence: "We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy and

insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them;"

You have listened to me enough to know that I have a great deal of respect for individuals with the courage to go against the majority.

That doesn't mean that I have that kind of courage in every event of life, even though I had that kind of courage once during the Nome years. I just ran across a description of those days. (Letter dated May 11, 1978) "Today we had a public meeting involving the business community and those of us gathering the signatures. It was the conclusion of a long process of pressure tactics (no threats) seeking to get us to withdraw the petition. We refused.

"This evening, the bar owners association announced that they have voluntarily cut back their bar hours by 41 hours per week. They will now open at 11 a.m. each day (instead of the current 8 a.m.), they will actively lobby for a detoxification center in Nome, they will 'police ourselves' and 'levy fines on themselves'. In addition, they will close on Sunday."

My response? "Put it in the law. What can be done voluntarily (before the election) can be undone voluntarily after the election."

I Kings 22 is one of my favorite Bible passages, but it isn't in the lectionary. So to use it on a Sunday morning, I have to add it to the process. It is lengthy. I invite you to follow in your Pew Bible.

I Kings 22 For three years Aram and Israel continued without war. <sup>2</sup>But in the third year King Jehoshaphat of Judah came down to the king of Israel. <sup>3</sup>The king of Israel said to his servants, 'Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, yet we are doing nothing to take it out of the hand of the king of Aram?' <sup>4</sup>He said to Jehoshaphat, 'Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?' Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, 'I am as you are; my people are your people, my horses are your horses.'

<sup>5</sup> But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, 'Inquire first for the word of the LORD.' <sup>6</sup>Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred of them, and said to them, 'Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?' They said, 'Go up; for the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.' <sup>7</sup>But Jehoshaphat said, 'Is there no other prophet of the LORD here of whom we may inquire?' <sup>8</sup>The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he

never prophesies anything favourable about me, but only disaster.' Jehoshaphat said, 'Let the king not say such a thing.'<sup>9</sup> Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, 'Bring quickly Micaiah son of Imlah.'<sup>10</sup> Now the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing-floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them.<sup>11</sup> Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, 'Thus says the LORD: With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'<sup>12</sup> All the prophets were prophesying the same and saying, 'Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.'

<sup>13</sup> The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, 'Look, the words of the prophets with one accord are favourable to the king; let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favourably.'<sup>14</sup> But Micaiah said, 'As the LORD lives, whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak.'

<sup>15</sup> When he had come to the king, the king said to him, 'Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?' He answered him, 'Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.'<sup>16</sup> But the king said to him, 'How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?'<sup>17</sup> Then Micaiah<sup>\*</sup> said, 'I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the LORD said, "These have no master; let each one go home in peace."<sup>18</sup> The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favourable about me, but only disaster?'

<sup>19</sup> Then Micaiah<sup>\*</sup> said, 'Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him.'<sup>20</sup> And the LORD said, "Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" Then one said one thing, and another said another,<sup>21</sup> until a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, "I will entice him."<sup>22</sup> "How?" the LORD asked him. He replied, "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then the LORD<sup>\*</sup> said, "You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it."<sup>23</sup> So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has decreed disaster for you.'

<sup>24</sup> Then Zedekiah son of Chenaanah came up to Micaiah, slapped him on the cheek, and said, 'Which way did the spirit of the LORD pass from me to speak to you?'<sup>25</sup> Micaiah replied, 'You will find out on that day when you go in to hide in an inner chamber.'<sup>26</sup> The king of Israel then ordered, 'Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son,<sup>27</sup> and say, "Thus says the king:

Put this fellow in prison, and feed him on reduced rations of bread and water until I come in peace." ' 28 Micaiah said, 'If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me.' And he said, 'Hear, you peoples, all of you!'

29 So the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 30 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes.' So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. 31 Now the king of Aram had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, 'Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel.' 32 When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, 'It is surely the king of Israel.' So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out. 33 When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. 34 But a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel between the scale-armour and the breastplate; so he said to the driver of his chariot, 'Turn around, and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded.' 35 The battle grew hot that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans, until at evening he died; the blood from the wound had flowed into the bottom of the chariot. 36 Then about sunset a shout went through the army, 'Every man to his city, and every man to his country!'

37 So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; they buried the king in Samaria. 38 They washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria; the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the LORD that he had spoken. 39 Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? 40 So Ahab slept with his ancestors; and his son Ahaziah succeeded him. "

So there you have it. 400 to 1. That is impressive odds. 400 told the King what he wanted to hear. One eventually, sort of, told the truth. In my own Bible I have this written: "A story that is powerful to me."

There are times in history when numbers are not very impressive. I would invite you not be impressed with numbers. If some one says, "everyone is doing it". Be cautious. If some one says that 75 % of the population is in favor of something, be cautious. If some one says only 14% of the America people approve of such and such, beware. Can 86% of the American people be wrong? Yes they can.

One of my heroes in the faith is a pope. And it wasn't just because his name was John. Pope John the Twenty-Third was a very brave man, as he attempted to bring some significant change to the Roman Catholic Church during

the early 1960's. But what can be done by one pope can be undone by another pope.

Pope John called you and me a "brothers and sisters in the faith". He opened up doors for interfaith dialogue. Catholics were allowed to worship with Protestants. The tension in interfaith marriages was lowered a bit. But that was in the 1960's. Now we are in another century and it is déjà vu time.

Recently (July 10<sup>th</sup>?) an article in the Everett Herald brought the bad news. "Catholicism the only true church, pope rules." "Pope Benedict XVI reasserted the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church, approving a document released Tuesday that says other Christian communities are either defective or not true churches, and Catholicism provides the only true path to salvation."

Lots of wonderful things have happened in the past forty (44) years of interfaith dialogue. During our years in Nome the local Catholic priest was a friend and colleague.

When the Alaska Christian Conference of Churches was looking for a new President in 1977, I was nominated for the post by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Fairbanks. In 1979, at my invitation, he preached in my pulpit at Nome, Alaska. There was no mention of our being a defective church. I am saddened to see interfaith dialogue slow down or even move backwards.

I am saddened when majorities run roughshod over minorities, be they Irish, Italians, Polish, American Indians, Japanese, Chinese, Black persons or Hispanics. And I am saddened when political figures abuse power in order to get their own agenda adopted. And I am saddened by the fate of the Christian faith when we get so far from the message and spirit of Jesus Christ. In such times I look for the minority voice to bring us back to sanity. 400 to 1. Such odds are nothing in the face of the power of God's truth and God's wisdom and God's will for all human beings.

When children or youth say, "everyone is doing it", that is the time to pay attention. When adults say, "how can you possibly think such and such is true", it is time to stand firm for what you believe is the right thing to do or to believe.

When people resort to name calling instead of dealing with the real issues, it is time to get some steel in your back and speak forth for justice and righteousness, mercy and truth. The prophetic role in the life of our church is an appropriate role for both pastor and the people. We have a slight introduction to the prophetic role today by utilizing the words in the lectionary relating to the prophet Amos, as well as to a prophet not very well known by the name of Micaiah. If we had patron saints in The United Methodist Church, I think Micaiah would be mine. It is especially helpful when there are so many voices trying to get us to do the wrong thing.

There are many pressures to silence the prophets in our midst. We ignore their words at our own peril.