



Glendive/Wibaux United Methodist Church
August 25, 2019

Jeremiah 1:4-10, Hebrews 12:18-28, Luke 13:10-17

Sermon Title: Stirred, Not Shaken

If you hadn't noticed, there have been some improvements on the Towne Street sidewalk in front of the church. I've talked with some of the guys doing the work over the past weeks, always inviting them to come into the church for respite or to use the restroom. I asked a state supervisor why this sidewalk was being replaced. We all know the choppy nature of the Kendrick Avenue sidewalk. He told me it wasn't originally on the contract's scope of work, but that they had time and resources and so are replacing those panels deemed unsafe. All this, just along Towne from the bridge to Merrill. What a wonderful gift to refresh our church appearance without us even doing a thing or paying for it. This is a blessing that came out of nowhere. No one asked our permission, nor did we have to formally accept this gift. It came to us. Reminds me of our greatest gift.

Let us pray.

Generous Creator may the knowledge of your unmerited gifts of grace and mercy carry us through the next few minutes as I speak, and we hear words that may be pleasing to you. Amen.

Part of the scope of work for the improvements was to grind down the existing pavement to make way for new paving. In my office, I was rattled and shaken, and the windows sung a tune of stress, as the road outside was pounded and ripped apart. The work was scraping on the surface and slightly below, but what is deeper was unseen. Even the wood pipes along Meade and the sprinkler heads out front really weren't that deep. The deeper one digs below the surface, the more foundational rocks and artifacts and history and difficulty you find. The deeper you go, the harder to discern what's there.

Look at the graphic on front of the bulletin. This depiction of the mass of berg under the water, massive compared to what we can see above, has been used as a metaphor in religion, leadership, relationships, marketing, etc. Today I see it as the power of the shaking earth. Maybe because I was getting a bit rattled last week when the trucks were outside the office window. But the shaking and roiling didn't disturb me. I knew what caused it and I was stirred to interest, shaken at the seams but not torn asunder, to use biblical words.

Shaking and rattling and rolling, not shaken, but stirred.

Jeremiah was beyond stirred; he was shaken to the core. He said, "Hold it, Master GOD! Look at me. I don't know anything. I'm only a boy!" ⁷⁻⁸ GOD told me, "Don't say, 'I'm only a boy.' I'll tell you where to go

and you'll go there. I'll tell you what to say and you'll say it. Don't be afraid of a soul. I'll be right there, looking after you." GOD's Decree.

⁹⁻¹⁰ GOD reached out, touched my mouth, and said, "Look! I've just put my words in your mouth—hand-delivered! See what I've done? I've given you a job to do among nations and governments—a red-letter day! Your job is to pull up and tear down, take apart and demolish, and then start over, building and planting." *The Message* Demolish and then build back up. Demolish and build back up. Go deep into the earth, into your soul, into your true self; demolish and then build back up.

This is heavy stuff and takes heavy equipment to accomplish. Not graders and 6-ton trucks, but time and prayer and delving into scripture and learning from saints and martyrs. This heavy work takes time: time, the most finite resource we have and one we waste.

Like the finite lives of icebergs and ice cliffs, which end up falling into the sea, wasted for eternity by climate change, never to support even minimal life forms again, our time cannot be rebuilt or regained. There is no manmade substitute for time. We can never get it back. If we destroy and demolish, waste it – it can't be rebuilt. God and the miracle that is our frail mortal bodies have provided each of us with a certain amount of time to use. That's it!

I'm here this morning to ask that you reconsider how you use your time. Use it not as we all too often do, to be only stirred by something we see or hear. But to be shaken into action. Action to follow Jeremiah and to rebuild something new, plant new seeds of faith. Demolish something in your life that is no longer useful or sustainable or functioning for the good of others. Tear out the old and toxic and make way for something new. Our time is too precious to waste on things and people that merely stir us but do not shake us into new and better human beings.

One of the first things maybe we ought to do, is seriously think about what we believe is the most important thing in life; what we spend our time in. Many will say their family, their kids, etc. But what is the underlying reason for that answer? 'Because procreation is a basic instinct.' Why is family so important? Jesus told his disciples to leave their families and follow him. Told that rich kid to give up his possessions and follow him. So why is family so important? And I am not saying it shouldn't be the most important in our lives, but why? Maybe your answer to what is most important to you, involves status of some kind, in the church, community, profession. It's important to have good and loving and compassionate reputations. But why is it a belief that is most important to us?

..Just look again at the berg with behaviors and symbols we see over the water. Visible to us and others. Then our true selves, the values and beliefs we hold, are just below the surface, but quite large. And they are quite large because they inform our behaviors and symbols. Something as simple as wearing a cross or the United Methodist cross and flame represent beliefs and values of Christianity or the United Methodist church. But just how deep is that faith? Or is it just a symbol, on the surface. We must take the time to answer this for ourselves.

I wish we had video where I could share with you the power and sound of a piece of iceberg breaking off. Powerful, yet happens over time when there is a disruption: climate change, global warming, drilling for oil, etc. And when our behaviors change and they don't match our beliefs and values, what's underlying, they break off. When we are acting out of what we truly believe, when our behaviors reflect our true beliefs and

values, then the berg remains solid and lives a long time. When our behaviors and our symbol don't reflect what we truly believe, then there is damage.

And for Christians, that destruction results in harm to our beliefs and values. And those are what keep us alive and strong. Our values and beliefs are evident in our behaviors and symbols. When there is disconnect between the two, we need to get back to the strength of our beliefs. We are at risk of falling apart, losing a piece of our humanity, which may be lost forever, when we allow others to impact our behaviors such that our foundations are eroded.

All this takes time, which is limited for each of us. If we use our time in building deeply discerning our beliefs and values, then we sustain and thrive. Otherwise... Understanding your honest beliefs and values, and not just saying they are based on reading the entire bible once or memorizing scriptures as a child or accepting what your parents taught you, will take time. And it takes more than a 12 minute sermon on Sunday's or attending worship once a week.

There is no reason to wait to dig into your spiritual base, your foundation, until you retire, or have more time. Now is the time. God told Jeremiah, now is the time, I'll give you what you need. But Jeremiah, and we must take action, be shaken into the task. My call, my role, my responsibility, is to shake you into action. I am going to close with an affirmation. We do not all need to come to the same set of values and beliefs; we don't now! Fifteen people may participate in the upcoming book study and still come to understand it differently, 15 different ways. Also, we may have similar behaviors and symbols, but not uniformed beliefs or values. And that is okay. It is Wesleyan in fact.

In a recent treatise by Dr. Jeffrey Kuan, the President of Claremont School of Theology and others, they wrote, "In The Book of Discipline (2016) of The United Methodist Church, a section in ¶105 spells out "Our Theological Task" as United Methodists. It begins by defining theology as "our effort to reflect God's gracious action in our lives," adding that "our theological explorations seek to give expression to the mysterious reality of God's presence, peace and power in the world. By so doing, we attempt to articulate more clearly our understanding of the divine-human encounter and are thereby more fully prepared to participate in God's work in the world." (*This is our beliefs and values, inserted*) Our Book of Discipline states further that our theological task is both critical and constructive, individual and communal, contextual and incarnational, as well as practical. What this implies is that our tradition recognizes that doing theology—knowing God—takes effort. While we do have a set of Articles of Religion, our ever-changing contexts necessitate that every generation engage its own theological task and rethink God anew. If our theology is to be critical and constructive as well as contextual and incarnational, no one theological articulation can pretend to be univocal and universal. If the reality of God's presence in our lives is indeed mysterious, we cannot pretend that anyone of us at any given time and place has a full comprehension of God that is not in constant need of rethinking. We each have a story to tell about God and what God is doing in our lives, but all of these stories are ongoing."

<https://www.emergingmethodism.com/new-article/the-multifaceted-nature-of-progressive-theology> August 23, 2019

I want you to invite the Holy Spirit to shake you up, guide you in a period of further and deeper examination of your beliefs and values. My prayer is that you will be ready to rebuild in God's time.

Amen and Selah.