

“Frustrated with God, Praying for Peace”

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Have any of you ever been at a church that makes you say things to “your neighbor?” You know, just to say, “Hi” or ok look at your neighbor and say, “God is good!” Look to your other neighbor and say; “All the time.” Look back at your first neighbor and say, I don’t know; we’re going to Disney World!

I love the joy here. I really do. How could you not be happy about Disney World? I’m smiling like a girl who just unwrapped her Barbie dreamhouse. Hold onto it because I might be about to ruin it. Like orange juice right after brushing your teeth. Yeah, its ok. We’ll be fine. But just let me tell you why.

Its these scriptures. I mean really. They make me want to cough up a hairball. Cause Look, it has been a stressful week . . . well, month really. Well, season really. Well, you get the picture. I could really use just a little bit of joy, a little peace right about now, but when I read through the texts for this morning’s service. They make me feel . . . frustrated. Yeah, frustrated.

In Isaiah, God is speaking to people who’ve been kicked out of their homeland due to war and tells them, “forget the former things, and the things of old. For I’m about to do something new. Can’t you see it?” Sure, that sounds great, but I can’t forget the things that happened.

I can’t just turn off my ingrained physical memory of the last couple of months where I’ve witnessed so much trauma on a generational level. You do understand that the things we have witnessed over the last couple of years will affect an entire generation for the rest of their existence, and generations to come? Yeah, I can’t just forget that, and it frustrates me that God seems to want to do the same.

What about Paul? He says that everything he has, he considers it lost for the sake of Christ. And he wishes us to model his life, so he’s really telling us that the key is to forget about it all. Count it all as loss. If you want to experience resurrection, you must give it all up. Ok, Paul. I’m sorry but I cannot let go of another thing at this moment because too much has already been taken. Why could I even consider giving anything up when almost all that I am has been ripped from me? No.

And then there’s Jesus. I mean . . . I’m for the cause and everything but is Judas not right? Jesus’ response frustrates me. What do you mean, “You’ll always have the poor?” If poverty is here to

stay, then what is the point of all of this? I mean it would be like if you found out that I took \$900 out of the youth's Mission Trip budget and went and got the best massage of all time. Then said; "Ah, there'll always be mission trips, but if I didn't release some of this tension, shoo there's no tellin' how much longer I would have lasted." It is a frustrating answer.

One time I was at a baseball game with a youth camp. There were some fifth graders sitting beside me, two boys that were full of energy. Somehow, we got on the topic of geometry. Actually, it was more like dialectic geometry — much more philosophical than mathematical. I have no idea why or how we got there, but we were. Now, I did not perform well in geometry. I know more about the narwhal than I do geometry. I DO remember one geometrical factoid: *All squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares.*

For some reason, in my conversation with some fifth graders, that was a sentence that came out of my mouth. "It's kind of like how all squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares", I thought it was pretty self-explanatory if you just thought about it for a second. But those kids looked at me like I had gotten kicked in the mouth by a goat and told them the earth was the shape of a snorkel. They told me that I was wrong, and like a shark smelling blood in the water, I latched on. I joyfully argued with those kids for hours. You know how long baseball games are!

I said that phrase more than "Alexander Hamilton" is said in the Broadway show. I mean c'mon! It makes perfect sense, and I don't understand how they didn't get it to this day. They knew what a square was, and they knew what a rectangle was, and that they were not the same thing, but they couldn't see the relationship between the two. I got other people involved and broke it down; "What is a rectangle: a shape with four sides and four right angles. Ok good, what is a square? A shape with four right angles and four *equal* sides; OK! So by definition a square is a *rectangle* (a shape with four sides and four right angles) that happens to also have *equal* sides!"

No, one is a square, and one is a rectangle — they're different. To them it was like comparing a zucchini and a mushroom. The impeccable lack of logic absent from the brains of these children ruined me. While it was comical for me (and I really was just messing around with them), it was also frustrating.

How could they not see something that was so obvious that was being pointed out to them? What many people were telling them? How could they not let go of their "this and that" thinking and see that there were nuances and relationships between things. It seemed pretty obvious to me that sure there are squares and rectangles but there is obviously a right answer here. I'm pointing it out to you, yet it seems like you're not listening to me!

When I think about the state of the world right now I feel like God is the child that I'm trying to explain the obvious to! Can you not see that people are suffering!? Can you not see that there is a

war going on? Can you not see that I am struggling too? Why can't there be peace? Can you not see that this is something that needs to be fixed, or at least addressed? Have these things not happened enough already? Can you just be God for a moment and bring some peace?

Praying for peace, I'm frustrated with God! Why can't there be peace? I know I'm not alone here, and if I am — If I'm the only one who asked these questions — then we've got a bigger issue of faith on our hands. I know I'm not alone, and that's ok.

What is the heart to do when it encounters the unexplainable sting of suffering upon those you love? Forget about it? I don't think so.

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, can you not see it? I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, the wild animals will honor me, the jackals, and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.”

(DEEP BREATH)

What if God doesn't want us to forget what happened to us.

What if God wants us to put aside what God has done in the past, for just a moment?

Hmmm. Yeah.

God does not want you to forget and move on.

I've led you on a little bit because today's scriptures are not about what has transpired in our lives, but our inability to see what God is trying to do right in front of our eyes.

What Isaiah is trying to say is:

Forget the old ways of peace you thought you knew.

Forget the old ways of prosperity you thought you knew.

Forget the old ways of deliverance you thought you knew.

Forget what you think God *could* do and look to see what God is *trying* to do!

We might be in the wilderness but there is a way through it. We might be in the desert but there is a river running through it.

We look back and say, “There used to be peace? Why can’t we just have that again?” Maybe God is beckoning us to see that the kind of peace we thought we had won’t get us through *this*. God is doing a new thing.

We look back and say, “These pews and these classrooms used to be full! I really wish we could just go back to that.” Maybe God is calling us to see that the way we brought people in isn’t going to cut it today. But God is doing a new thing.

We look back and say, “My life used to be easy. Why can’t I just go back to that?” Maybe God is showing us that the things we thought to work *then* won’t get you through *this*. God is doing a new thing.

In Isaiah, people wanted an Exodus kind of miracle. But God was telling them that something even greater was on the way. Paul thought that he had it all, but he realized that there was something even greater on the way, and that even though he had *lost everything, resurrection* was on its way. The disciples thought they could care for the poor by just throwing money at the problems, but Jesus was about to show them how to partner with the poor.

Maybe the reason I’m frustrated is because I’m looking at God, trying to tell God how I want to be delivered from out of my wilderness. Maybe I’m looking at God trying to point out the obvious while God is trying to show me something greater. It turns out that I am the child, looking at shapes and only seeing what I believe to be the way things are, and God is trying to show me things are not as they seem. I’m forgetting the relationships and nuances that exist in our world. The way we treat our earth turns forests into deserts. But God desires to put a river through it. There will always be war when our leaders desire power over prosperity for *all* their people. But God calls us to pray and advocate for peace. There will always be poor people when our economy *produces* poverty. Yet Jesus showed us how to partner *with* the poor.

I believe that God *is* good, and that God is calling us into a life of deep peace for ourselves and for others. It turns out that I was just frustrated *at* God, but I wasn’t doing anything *with* God. Now, I can imagine that when God sees the systems in our world that we have created, and how we long to go back to when they were simply covered up, God could be frustrated too, and calling us each to step forward into something new.

So today I’m choosing not to be frustrated *at* God, but Frustrated *with* God, and praying for peace. I hope you’ll do the same.

Amen.