

## **A REDUCED GOD**

**ISAIAH 42:14**

**ISAIAH 49:15**

**LUKE 15:8-10**

**Permit me an observation. Some people get real upset, some individuals get out of whack, even some Christians get out of joint, when it comes to inclusive language.**

**I remember not too long ago here at Wedgewood during Advent the choir was scheduled to sing *Let There Be Peace On Earth*. Well, you know the words. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. Later the words are "brothers all are we." Problem is females aren't brothers. So the suggestion was made that inclusive language be used and---and all hell broke loose. And it happened the next time the song was sung by the heavenly choir. Ironically, and you have my permission to chuckle at this, ironically every time *Let There Be Peace On Earth* was sung there was no peace at Wedgewood.**

**Inclusive language.**

**Confession. Even though I considered myself a liberated man, even a feminist, it hasn't been that long ago that I was of the opinion that when it came to language, when it came to inclusive language, some females, some XX chromosomes, were being just a little bit too sensitive. They were, in my estimation, going overboard. They were being a tad thin-skinned, ready to pounce on the male species. In my way of thinking, language was not that important. Why raise a stink about words? Isn't that the wrong battle to fight?**

**More recently I have come to see the importance of language. I no longer believe words are trivial. Rather, I see language as evocative. The words we use impact how we live, what we think, what we become. Language is world-creating, reality-producing. Language is about how the world is to be construed, how life is to be embraced. So no wonder so many people are passionate about words. Who controls words, to some degree, controls the world, or at least, some segment of it. So there is no pure grammar. Language, I have come to discover, is laden with, intertwined with, enmeshed with politics.**

**I'll provide a few examples.**

**In 1981 a U.S. nuclear attack submarine was launched. It cost \$900 million. It had a submerged speed of 32 knots. The sub carried Harpoon and Tomahawk missiles. It was named after a city in Texas, Corpus Christi. Anyone know what Corpus Christi means?----  
-----It means "body of Christ".**

See the importance of language. We wouldn't name one of our subs, Corpus Satan, the body of Satan, would we? No, we name it the body of Christ to under gird the idea that God is on our side so we can use this submarine to blow up our enemies.

Well, a Roman Catholic priest protested about the naming of the submarine and the name of the sub was changed. Anyone know what they changed the sub's name to?-----  
They changed the name of the sub to the US City of Corpus Christi.

Words. Words are very important.

In 1984 the United States began production of its new intercontinental ballistic missile. The missile had a range of greater than 6,000 miles and a speed of 15,000 miles per hour. The missile carried ten warheads. Guess what our government decided to name the missile. The Peacekeeper. Interesting use of language. If you want peace you have to have these missiles to blow up the world. Interesting.

We could have named it Enemy Killer or The Big Stick, but we named it Peacekeeper.

The importance of words.

O.K. let's look at something closer to home. Let's think for a few moments about the very difficult situation of having an animal that is very old and is having trouble walking or breathing or living. You hate to see your animal suffer. So you take your pet to the vet and the animal is ----well, what words do we use to describe it? We say the animal is "put to sleep"? I've also heard it said that the animal is "put down". We don't speak of killing our pet, do we? No, we use words to help us deal with an action that none of us likes.

Words. Is someone a freedom fighter or a terrorist? What makes a religious group a cult?

A local group, HELP, Helping Empower Local People, recently made newspaper headlines in its work not for a minimum wage for some city employees but a living wage. Is the Mecklenburg public school assignment plan about choice, neighborhood schools, or equality, or is it about white people and middle and upper class people not wanting their children to go to schools with African-Americans and lower class children?

The language we use describes the reality we think we live in or the reality we desire. Language is one instrument, a major factor, in creating a certain reality.

Which leads me to the Christian faith. One of the key things Jesus spoke of was the kingdom of God, the reign of God. The kingdom of God has to do with how the world is supposed to be, according to God. The world according to God. It is "on earth as it is in heaven". The kingdom of God is about a present reality, not what God has in store for us in the next world. And what inclusive language is about is trying to support the reality that God is creating on this earth this very minute. Inclusive language is not about a bunch of Christians like me who are just trying to mess up *Let There Be Peace On Earth* or insist on our way. To be frank, if I had my druthers we would never in our practice of worship use

**inclusive language. Personally, being an XY chromosome I prefer the reign of men. Personally, I vote for the kingdom of Christ. But as a Christian, well, as a person who is trying to be a Christian, as a student of the life of the one who spoke about the kingdom of God and taught us to pray that it would happen on earth, well---I know there's no way I can get away with the reign of men or the reign of Christ. So I try to use inclusive language as a way of supporting what I believe God is trying to do on this earth, which includes helping us to practice an inclusive love, an inclusive love that is enhanced by inclusive language.**

**We have a choice. We can use language to exclude or we can use language to include. We can use language to hurt others or we can use language to bless and affirm others. How do you think God wants you and me to use language?**

**There's a second reason I try to be careful with the words that come out of my mouth, a second reason I refer to God not only as a He but also as a She. I've noticed that although the dominant witness in the Bible is the male metaphor of God, I've noticed the Bible also contains many references to God as a woman. So when I refer to God as a woman I'm just being biblical.**

**Did you hear our scripture passages? The prophet Isaiah compares God to a woman in labor. God is described as gasping and panting. Takes you right back to the LaMaze classes, doesn't it?**

**And then in the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah God's love is compared to that of a mother's love for her child. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?" God then says, "I will not forget you." I will not forget you anymore than a mother could forget the child who nursed at her breasts.**

**God as a She. Right there. It's right there.**

**If that's not enough for you, consider that Jesus referred to God as a woman. Now we all know the parable of the prodigal son. We've heard at least a zillion sermons on that passage, but before that wonderful parable is another text and it too is a picture of God. The parable of the prodigal son compares God to a father who demonstrates unconditional love to a wayward son. Well, our third scripture lesson compares God to a woman who has lost a coin. She sweeps and sweeps and sweeps until she finds the lost coin. She sweeps the entire house. And when she finds the coin she calls her friends together and says, "Rejoice with me!" That is what God is like Jesus says. God is like a woman sweeping a house to find a lost coin.**

**Now if Jesus referred to God as a woman, don't you think we should do it too! Amen!**

**When we settle for just the male metaphor for God what we end up with is a greatly reduced God.**

**Frankly, I'm not for replacing the male metaphor for God with the female metaphor. I'm not for eliminating references to God as Father. I don't support that at all. I'm just for using more of the metaphors for God than one, using more than the Father metaphor.**

**The Bible actually has numerous metaphors for God. In addition to God being compared to a father and a mother, God is described as a husband, companion, friend, advocate, liberator, king, warrior, judge, dairymaid, shepherd, farmer, someone doing laundry, construction worker, potter, fisherman, midwife, merchant, physician, bakerwoman, teacher, writer, artist, nurse, metal worker, homemaker, an angry mother bear, a protective mother hen, and a pregnant woman. There is a plethora of images for God. We should not restrict our worship to the Father image to the neglect of the others. The elimination of these other metaphors, in my opinion, is not good for our spiritual well-being.**

**Permit me to share a story. Not too many days ago I headed toward Carolinas Medical Center. I checked in at the maternity desk inquiring about the LeDayne and Kate and Tom Polaski situation. I was told that it was just about time for Kate to enter the world. The nurse wanted to know if I wanted her to inform LeDayne and Tom that I was there. Well, you don't have to make an "A" in Pastoral Care 101 to know you don't get a nurse to enter a room to tell a female who is in the last minutes of labor that her male Pastor has arrived. "No, I'll just wait in the waiting room, thank you."**

**It wasn't too long, though, until Kate arrived and the Polaskis were informed I was at the hospital and I was invited into the room to see Kate and Mom and Dad and to say a prayer to God thanking God for Kate. What a great job I have!**

**The most precious moment for me was seeing LeDayne gently hold Kate in her arms. And hearing, and hearing Kate making cooing sounds. It was wonderful. I thought to myself, how could anyone have trouble with the metaphor of God as a mother? I left that hospital room hoping and praying God is like a mother.**

**Yes, I can understand why someone who has a bad relationship with their mother could have major trouble with the Mother God idea. But I wish, I wish anyone who has difficulty with God as She could have been in that hospital room that day. For it is a wonderful thing to be mothered.**

**Is there anyone here today who needs to be mothered? Is there anyone here who needs to be mothered by God? Do you need to be held gently? Do you need to be loved so much that you end up making cooing sounds? When is the last time a coo came out of your mouth?**

**A few years ago I realized how much I needed to be mothered. We were engaged in one of those easy to lose your religion tasks. We were painting inside our house. It was a non-summer month and it was a tad chilly. I had the windows open to let out the paint fumes. And while I was painting my mother called. Mothers don't always call at the most opportune times, do they? Mom started talking and, sure enough, she started mothering**

**me. "What was I doing? How was I doing it? Did I have a long sleeve shirt on to prevent me from getting a cold since the window was open---and to keep the paint off my arms?"**

**My first reaction was, and I didn't say this to her, I thought it---my first reaction was, hey I'm an adult. I know how to paint. And I don't need your help." That was my first reaction, but then I realized what she was doing, that she was mothering me, and I decided just to enjoy it. And it felt good, real good.**

**I'll ask you again.**

**Is there anyone here today who needs to be mothered by God? Do you need to be held gently? Do you need to be loved so much that you end up making cooing sounds? Do you need a mother to worry about you getting a cold while you are painting with the windows open?**

**I hope and pray God is like a mother, and a shepherd and a father and a husband and a companion and a friend and an advocate and a liberator and a farmer and a potter and a fisherman and a physician and a bakerwoman and a .....**