Isaiah 58:6-12 and Ecclesiastes 3:3

"Repairers of the breach"

After the national election in 2018 I wrote an enews that upset some people to the point where they were considering leaving the church. It was a time in our church where we were getting a lot of high school youth who were not connected to the church hanging out in the well, just for the free snacks and drinks. We affectionately called them the biker boys because, well, they rode bicycles around town. Every now and then I would get to church and I would see one of them asleep on the couch in the well in the morning, every now and then one of them would set off the alarm because they were sleeping on the couch in the church and went to the bathroom and the alarm went off.

After that election I wrote in an enews, I don't lose sleep over who wins or loses and election, but I do lose sleep over where are the bikers boys staying this evening. Some could not understand how callous I was after what they considered this momentous election that would set the path of the nation down a course where the least of these would be oppressed and the poor would be overlooked and discarded. While all of that was potentially true, I don't see the fate of the world in the hands of who gets elected in our country. I see the fate of the world in the hands of God.

Today after one of the most consequential elections in the history of our nation, I'm not losing sleep over the results. You see, I don't believe that God's kingdom takes his marching orders from what happens electorally in the United States. God's vision and God's love for all the world includes us, but is not defined by us. We lose sight of that, we get so caught up in our own fears and our concerns for the future of this nation that we lose of the kingdom of God and what role will be play in that kingdom, which is far more important.

Ecclesiastes 3 and our study of it over these past few weeks has reminded us that for every action there will be an opposite and often more powerful reaction, which might explain Tuesday evening. But our Scripture today speaks of healing and restoration as the opposites of killing and tearing down and I would argue that our task is to be those who are more powerful in healing and building up than we are in tearing down and killing. Let's read

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We find ourselves celebrating something special this Sunday. We are celebrating the birthday of our church and for the past 15 years we have had a church celebration where we have

lifted up our 50 year members in honor and respect for what they have done to put the church in a position in which it finds itself today. Can we have the 50 year members stand? This church was founded in 1832 which means that it experienced a lot in the history of our nation. It made it through the Civil War, WWI, WWII, the 60's turmoil, today as well. It saw a lot of killing and a lot of tearing down in its history as the body of Christ.

During these significant events in the life of our nation people in this church were probably on opposite sides of each of those issues. Do we support the north or the south, do we want to be isolationists or come to the aid of our European allies. Do we align ourselves with the civil rights movement or do we try to maintain our way of life to the detriment of other human beings. In these pews people on both sides of the issues sat and listened to preachers speak from the Bible also probably on both sides of the issue. Somehow over these years we have been able to worship sitting side by side and some of us being on opposite sides of the aisle.

In 1946 Norma Weaver joined First Presbyterian. If anyone is good at math in this building can you tell me how many years that is? Over those 80 years she has seen, and I counted them **so many pastors**. She has in her lifetime in this church seen seasons of growth and seasons of dire need, even discussion of shutting down the church because they couldn't pay the pastor.

Today, we stand on the shoulders of people like Norma Weaver who went before us and did the work and put in the time and sacrificed her resources for 80 years. We have many Norma Weavers in this church, we have many who have put decade up on decade into the life of this church so that it could represent the kingdom of God as closely as possible. They didn't always agree with each other. They didn't always agreed with the pastor, but they saw this place as a home where God's Word was being preached and the community was being impacted as a result.

We stand on the shoulders of those who chose to heal rather than to kill, those who chose to build up rather than tear down. Whenever we go on mission trips with the youth and we focus on construction, like all the times that we have gone to West Virginia and Florida to do these trips, do you know what the easiest, most fun, and most sought after job on the mission trip is? Demolition. I mean anyone can do it, it is easy, it is fun, it can get out of hand, but its demolition, who cares?

That's true in life, isn't it? Anyone can tear down, anyone can post online that someone or a whole group of people is stupid. It doesn't take any thinking or any research, just tearing

down people with your words is the easiest thing to do in life, even and especially people you don't even know. But to rebuild, to heal, that's hard. It is hard because it takes a lot of work, and a lot of patience, and a lot of being willing to fail and be hurt. You may start to build up and to heal but then it goes sideways and you have to start all over again. But this is who we are called to be, repairers of the breach, as Isaiah says, those who heal, those who build up after things have been torn down.

What struck me this week in my research was a Scripture in Hosea 6:1 which applies to our Ecclesiastes Scripture. In this Scripture who is it who is doing the tearing and the striking down? It is the Lord. In the midst of that we read in Isaiah, that we are called to step into the breach that was created. The most significant time that I can remember this Scripture was when a group of us from this church joined Strasburg Mennonite and went to Houston to do building repair after a hurricane and there we were in a house that was basically torn apart and he told us that we were called to be repairers of the breach.

We are as people both individually and collectively called to repair, to put things back together again whether it was the hand of God that did it or our own stubbornness and refusal to listen to the Lord that created the tear. Isaiah says that not only are we called to repair the breach but in vs.8 that we are called also to heal, just like Ecclesiastes states.

But the only way that we will be able to do it is to do that which those who went before us, upon whose shoulders we stand, were able to do it. That is by succumbing to the will of God. We can only heal and build up if we are willing to lay our lives before our Savior Jesus Christ and allow him to take our life and shape it and mold it for his purposes.

We live and move and have our being in an appointed pattern too vast and entangled for us to understand. But what we can understand is that our Christian faith rests in the will of God. It is God's will that has to be understood as primary, and not our will. We have to be willing to completely subordinate all the ways of our life to the sovereign will of God. Then, and only then, can we be the repairers of the breach.

If we want to try to force God's hand in one direction or another, well, we can try, but we will probably end up killing and tearing down, as opposed to healing and building up. There is a breach caused by a desire to forge our future in the way we see it. The way we understand life for our sake often leaves out the poor and the powerless and those in need as Isaiah lifts up.

Today we may be asking the question, what does the Lord require of us? Well, funny you should ask, Isaiah gives us an answer and it is the same answer that Hosea 6:8 gives to that question.

What the Lord requires of us, ultimately, is to be repairers of the breach. Amen.