

YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL

The Holy One

Isaiah 44:6-8; 46:3-10; 57:15

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/your-god-is-too-small-the-holy-one/>

More than any other prophet, Isaiah cried out that our God is too small. The Israelites tried to make God small, manageable. They wanted to domesticate God.

This tribal god blesses whatever we do. And hates whoever we hate. I love Anne Lamott's line: "You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates the same people you hate."

This summer at the gathering of the Baptist World Alliance, I made a journal entry about my experience. There, among all those nationalities and skin colors, I saw a Christ bigger than Western culture and politics. Karl Barth once led German pastors in standing up to Hitler's nationalism. Barth marveled that it never really occurs to us that God might be opposed to us. We always see God as the guarantor of our values, our point of view and our way of life, our tribe. What if we're wrong? What if God isn't pleased? What if the Holy One, the King expects something better and deeper from us? "

In 44:6, God self-describes as the King of Israel. If God is king, no one else is. Nothing else is. "There is no God besides me. There is no other rock" (44:8). "I am God. There is no other. I am God. There is no one like me" (46:9).

Did you notice Isaiah's contrast between the real God and false gods? The Holy One declares in 46:3, "I've carried you from your mother's womb and will until old age..." By contrast, when an idol is fashioned out of gold or silver, we have to pick it up and carry it around! We all would like to have a God we can domesticate and control, a cosmic Santa Claus. Here's an interesting thought. Maybe we never really grow up spiritually until we give up on a god we can control and yield ourselves to the Holy One, the King.

At this point, you may be thinking, "What's the point?" This God is too holy, too distant, a far-off king. But remember 57:15. "For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit..." Isn't that how we come into the faith? Finally acknowledging sin with a brokenness that makes room for God in our lives.

That small word "with" is so important. In Hebrew It connotes "at the side of," intimate fellowship. High and lifted up, yet at the side of. It matters deeply how we know and experience God. Last fall, I accompanied our Friendship Singers on one of their mission trips. At a care facility, Rod asked me to share a verse of scripture and a few words (never ask preachers if they can share a few words unless you really mean it). I shared from Isaiah, how the prophet

emphasizes that God knows our name. I said, "You're not just the resident in room 212; God knows you." After the service, a lady came up to me and asked why I had used room 212 in my message. I told her I just picked a random number. "No you didn't," she replied. "That's my mother's room number and you have no idea how badly she needed to hear that today."

Here is an amazing truth: We become like the God we worship. Brain science is making amazing discoveries. Andrew Newburg and Mark Robert Waldman have researched this topic. Contemplating a loving God strengthens portions of our brain...where empathy and reason reside. Contemplating a wrathful God empowers the limbic system, which is filled with aggression and fear. Brian McLaren comments: "The God we choose to love changes us into his image, whether [that God] exists or not." [*A New Kind of Christianity*, p. 273].

Each Sunday in this series, we've closed with the passage from 1 John 4:8, 10. "God is love. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."