

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Message

9/20/09 "God Insists on Persuasion" Jeremiah 3: 12, 21-22

Eli Wiesel spent years in one of the infamous Nazi concentration camps. He wrote about his own experiences in the book entitled "Night" for which he received the Nobel prize for literature.

He says that the prison guards could force anything on the prisoners. He witnessed a guard forcing a woman take her wedding ring off her finger as a gift to his wife. Another guard forced prisoners to beat up on their friends just for fun. Still, another guard forced a young prisoner curse his own father. The prison guards were all powerful. But one thing they could not force the prisoners to do. Wiesel writes, "They could not force us to love them."

He is right. No one can coerce love. Even God cannot force human beings to love him. The Bible says that God is entreating and persuading human beings to love him.

Jeremiah compares God who seeks to be loved with a jilted lover. Wounded and hurt, he is calling us to return to him.

But God does not swear revenge. Instead, he continues to persuade and entreat.

Listen to God's words of persuasion that Jeremiah heard. "Return, my faithless woman, says the Lord. I will heal your faithlessness. I will not look upon you in anger, for I am merciful, says the Lord."

Now how does God persuade us? The Gospel of John answers this question for us. "God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

In other words, God took the human form in Jesus of Nazareth in order to persuade us.

The 18th century theologian named Kierkegaard explains this profound truth by way of a parable. I think I introduced that parable to you before. Let me use it again in this new context.

A king falls in love with a young woman of low status. How should he express his love for her? Should he bring her to his palace? Then she may be awe struck by the gorgeous rooms and the expensive furniture. Should the king visit her in her small cabin in a golden chariot to ask for her love? Then she will be too frightened to know that he loves her.

So what should the king do? The parable ends with these words. "In order to marry her, the king abdicated his throne and became a plain woodsman."

Kierkegaard's parable illustrates perfectly the point of our sermon today. As the king became a woodsman, God came to us in Jesus of Nazareth.

You cannot force love. Even God cannot do that. The only possible way to communicate love is persuasion.

God's persuasion took place when he abandoned himself in Jesus of Nazareth.

Let us respond to God's persuasion. His passionate love is what makes our human life truly human. It is what braces us for the living of these days.

Thanks be to God.