

**Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood
May 9, 2010**

God's Grace

**Ps 67 & John 14:23-29
(Hymns – 376, 39, 534, 563)**

This Psalm was written to be sung at the harvest festival.
It is a hymn of thanksgiving and gratitude for God's grace.
That grace, that blessing
empowers and encourages the people
to be a blessing to others in gratitude for the grace they have received.
As someone commented on Friday night,
there is a powerful rhythm of gratitude and gladness
that runs throughout the poetry of this Psalm.

To have achieved that harvest,
been blessed by its abundance,
at least two things were needed.
God needed to make it possible
by creating the conditions and the resources
for growth and flourishing to take place
through his grace in creation.
And humans needed to make it happen
by cultivating the resources
in ways that promoted flourishing.
Abundant growth that brought forth such joy and praise
took an intimate partnership between God and specific humans.
God and humans were co-workers,
collaborators,
in achieving the desired consequences in the harvest.

The goal in all of this cooperation
is the cultivation of a mature plant that yields nourishing fruits or grains
that allows those who eat them to grow to healthy maturity.

Jill and I were out yesterday buying flowers and cherry tomatoes plants
for our balcony.

Those plants have already been seeded and cultivated
to a considerable degree with gifts God's grace gave the original growers.
But we will have to continue to water and feed them
to ensure that the flowers continue to blossom
and the tomatoes reach a maturity that will yield
wonderfully juicy, tasty little tomatoes
for our eating pleasure.

To bring in a harvest of any kind is a complex dance
of collaboration and cooperation
between God's grace and a number of different humans.

I cannot think of rich harvests without thinking of my grandmother's garden.

Nana lived in town called Georgetown,
just north and west of Toronto.
She cultivated a huge garden,
easily the size of our parking lot here at Brentwood.
It was full of flowers, and berries, and vegetables,
all coming on at different times of the growing season back there
and all designed to nourish the entire neighbourhood
with the beauty of the flowers and the nutrition of the foods.
She passed some of her passion and skill for gardening
down to my mother as well,
so we had a smaller garden at our home in Niagara Falls.

Between the two gardens,
we prepared foods that not only delighted us in the summer,
but also kept feeding us throughout the year.
Canned peaches and pickled beets were my favourites.

So, when I think of harvests,
of gratitude and gladness for the fruits of God's grace and human effort,
I think of the mothers in my life – both mother and grandmother.

John Calvin,
whose thoughts and actions sowed sturdy seeds
from which the Presbyterian churches around the world grew,
had some interesting things to say about motherhood.
He saw the church as the mother of the faithful.
God gathered his children into the bosom of the church
where they can be nourished into maturity.
We are nourished in the womb of the church,
fed at her breast,
cared for and guided by her loving compassion
until such time as we achieve the goal of faith –
being friends and co-workers with God
in his mission of *shalom* and well-being
for the whole of creation
and for all its peoples,
as Psalm 67 emphasizes so powerfully.

I think the passage that we read from John's gospel this morning
lays the foundation for our understanding of God as Trinity.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit –
father, sibling, and mother –
all working together as a family to love us into maturity
as friends of God.

The Trinity is what I think of as the Holy Family,
the three persons of God
loving us into maturity as friends of God.

There are lots of references in the Scriptures
to the mothering work and influence of the Holy Spirit,
often in language forms that are feminine rather than masculine.
Indeed, the Hebrew word for *Spirit – ruach* – is feminine.
And when we remember,
as we do often here at Brentwood,
the gifts of the Spirit Paul describes in Galatians –
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline –
those are the qualities that the best of a mothering influence
cultivates in each of us and all of us together.

What we enjoy in the church at its best
is family as it is meant to be at its best.
Granted, we are treasure in earthen vessels
and do not always live up to our calling.
But the presence of God's mothering Spirit
ensures that our efforts will be supplemented and complemented
by God's gracious influence
to provide the opportunities and conditions for people to flourish.
We each have to take up those opportunities
and make the best of those conditions
ourselves.

We have to choose to accept
the presence and power of God's influence
and incorporate it into our lives, into our very breathing.
We flourish by breathing in gratitude for God's grace
and breathing out gladness for the way that grace nourishes us.
But God's grace *is* there for our flourishing.

And we gather yet again this morning
at the family table of Jesus Christ.
We are invited to eat and drink with God –
with our father God, our sibling Jesus Christ, and our mother Spirit.

But let us think deeply on a key lesson from our Psalm this morning
as we gather afresh in this familiar place for this familiar meal.

That lesson is this:
we are blessed by the harvest made possible by God
in order to be a blessing to all peoples.
We are nourished, not only to flourish ourselves,
but also and more importantly, to help others flourish.
This meal is not simply about being fed by mother Church,
but about being fed in order to feed others.

In choosing the hymns for communion this morning,
I've tried to capture that key lesson.
Listen for the ways the words grasp your soul
as you sing them.
We gather gladly in our hunger to be fed by God.
Then we go out to employ our talents and tongues
in encouraging all the peoples of the world to breathe again.
These are powerful images of Christian flourishing.

I've played around with and mixed up
a lot of images and metaphors this morning –
harvests, and mothers, and families, and meals.
It's hard to capture the richness of God's presence with and for us
in the words of any language.
But I hope you have captured some sense
of the nourishing love of God in Jesus Christ.
May it feed us even more richly as we gather at the Lord's table.
Come, all is ready.
Let us taste and see afresh that the Lord is good.

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