

Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood

June 6, 2010

Help and Hope

Psalm 146 & Luke 17:11-17
(Hymns 462, 654, 534, 563)

Nothing was more central to the teachings of Jesus Christ than the themes of Psalm 146.

In many ways, it can be seen as a summary of all that was important to the mind of Christ. These are the possibilities that Jesus carried in his soul, the kind of community Jesus envisioned and strove for.

And what are those themes?
What are those possibilities?
What qualities of living together do we find in this Psalm?

Let's take a closer look.

First and foremost, we are urged to put our trust in God.
We praise most what we trust most.
We are most loyal to what we trust most.
Our hearts sing with joy in the presence of what we trust most.
There is a sense of security and well-being,
an unshakeable confidence,
in relationship to what we trust most.

The Hebrew phrase we translate as 'God of Jacob' is frequently used to refer to the protecting and saving actions of God. It recalls the ancient sanctuary at Bethel, literally, 'the house of God'. We remember it that familiar hymn that we sang this morning:

*O God of Bethel, by whose hand,
thy people still are fed,
who through this weary pilgrimage,
hast all thy servants led.*

The stark contrast here is between trust in God and trust in frail human beings, especially those leaders who set themselves up as worthy of unquestioned trust and obedience.

Only God is worthy of complete trust and obedience.
All leaders in whatever walk of life should be assessed
according to their concern for God's concerns.
Our model, in all these things, is Jesus Christ.
He is the first fruits of the new humanity,
the one who lived as God intended humans to flourish.

In the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ,
we see a human life lived in complete trust in God.
That is one of the truly distinguishing features of Christ's mission and ministry.
He is tempted to put his trust elsewhere, but refuses.
He stays true to his reliance on God for protection and salvation.

And out of this trust and reliance upon the God of Bethel,
the God of Jacob,
this God who calls and leads and protects and saves a people
to be his friends and ambassadors in this world,
arises a particular kind of life.
Psalm 146 provides a vivid picture of well-being of the world
that relies on the faithfulness of God.

That connection is crucial.
Our *shalom* or well-being
comes from God's faithfulness to his promise.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper this morning
and we talk about the new covenant in Christ's blood,
we are recalling yet again the faithfulness of God
to his promise to protect and save
so that we can be a blessing to the whole creation.

What that blessing looks like in concrete terms
is eloquently pictured in this psalm.
The oppressed receive justice.
The hungry are fed.
Prisoners are freed.
The blind see.
People's pride is restored.
The stranger is welcomed.
Orphans and widows are cared for.
The wicked wither away.

All this happens because God is truly in charge,
truly rules the creation with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness,
the things in which God delights
and sings *hallelujah* with us.

And God is inviting, pestering, encouraging, and provoking
us to be part of this venture,
part of this mission to bring *shalom* or well-being
to the world.

That is the mission we are being fed for
at the Lord's Table.
We gather for the family meal of the people of God.
Jesus Christ is our host,
the one who has prepared this food for our protection and salvation.
We are nourished by Christ
to be his body in the world.
We take in these elements and they spread through every cell in our bodies
to energize them for living the lives God is calling us to live this month.

I encourage you afresh today
to be on the alert
for opportunities to praise God with your whole being
in every situation in which you find yourself.
First and foremost, trust in God.
From the foundation of that trust, fear no human being.
Be of good grace in the way you greet and treat every other human being.
Seek and support justice for the oppressed.
Feed the hungry in body and soul.
Free those who are imprisoned by wickedness.
Help people see the truth.
Treat all people with respect and loving care.
Welcome strangers.
Take special care of the widows and orphans in your midst.
Let your own wickedness wither away
and trust that others can do the same
by trusting in and relying upon the God of Jacob.

This is the flourishing in the faith
that we are fed for at the Lord's Table.

So, let's eat with eagerness and relish,
with joy and thanksgiving,
as Jesus Christ feeds us for our mission in this world.

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