

Searched by the Psalms

**Psalm 100 & Luke 23:33-43
(Hymns – 65, 473, 736, 412)
November 21, 2010**

Joyful Worship

Well, we have reached the conclusion of our year
of being searched by the Psalms.
Every Sunday since last November,
we have opened our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit teaching us
the wisdom of one of the Psalms,
those wonderful prayers and songs
that have fed the devotion and faithfulness
of God's people over the centuries
and in every nation on the earth.

The Psalms we have considered over this past year
have reflected both the highs and lows of human experience,
but always in the context of our relationship with God –
for Christians, a God who came to redeem the world in Jesus Christ
and remains a faithful and trustworthy force in our lives
through the gentle and generous workings of the Holy Spirit.

We've seen everything, from
praise to penitence, from quietly confident faith to agonized confusion,
from joy at the wonder of life in God's world
to struggle to reach out to a God who seems elusive or absent,
from bowing humbly before the mystery of life
to bitter and urgent questioning of how something could possibly happen.
Every changing human mood and attitude
find expression in this incomparable collection of songs and prayers.

And your voices, along with Allan's music,
have written these Psalms on our hearts
in ways that will not be forgotten.

For centuries of Jewish and Christian history,
as God's people have gathered in praise and thanksgiving
to worship in gratitude the gracious works of God,
and as people have approached God in personal prayer and meditation,
the Psalms have been at the centre of their devotion and disciplines.
They have guided us into the paths of relationship and righteousness
where we are encountered by the glory of God in Jesus Christ
and invited to serve his reign over all the world.

At our Bible study on Friday evening,
Maurice came up with an idea about this Psalm
that I had not considered before.

That's really one of the blessings of that time of study together,
they way we enrich each other's understanding and practice
of the Christian faith in the service of the Reign of Christ.

Actually, Maurice didn't come up with the idea on his own.
The Spirit led him to the idea in Mathew Henry's commentary of Psalm 100.

Matthew Henry was a Presbyterian minister in England
who served congregations in Chester and Hackney
in the late 1600s and early 1700s.

He wrote an exegetical commentary on the Scriptures
that has been used for centuries
as a guide to understand how the Spirit through the Scriptures
teaches how to faithfully respond to God's faithfulness in Christ.

Maurice's idea was that this Psalm is prophetic,
in the sense that it is a prophecy of how things will be
when God's kingdom comes in its fullness on this earth.
All peoples will gather praising and thanking this God and this God alone.
They will know the truth that they are God's beloved creatures,
cared for by this God like a shepherd cares for his sheep,
but with an everlasting faithfulness that is unlike anything
they have ever experienced.

That's what makes putting this Christian faith of ours into words
so difficult and challenging.

We've used lots of words,
trillions upon gazillions of words
(especially Presbyterians)

to try and witness to and describe this God
we have come to know in Jesus Christ.

But God will never allow himself to be defined and confined
by our mere words.

It is always the encounter with Spirit of God
that forms the heart of the Christian faith and community.

In the beginning was this relationship
with the One who has made us

and in whose companionship we find full and flourishing life.

All words can do it point to this unique grace and truth.

But they can point powerfully and poignantly,
as they do in Psalm 100.

This short but powerful word picture of life in the Reign of God
is not simply something that will happen in the future or in heaven.

One of the most powerful themes in the Christian faith
is that the future God has planned for us,
the future depicted in the Psalm,
is present and available to us right now right here.

In the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ,
the One in whom this God reconciled the world to himself,
the kingdom came on earth,
full of grace and truth.

Sinners being crucified with Jesus,
hanging in their death throes on the cross beside him,
could be with him in glory on that day,
then and there,
just as we are with Jesus in his glory here and now.

The reign of Christ may not have reached its final glory,
when all the earth gathers in praise and thanksgiving,
but the foretaste, the first fruits, of that kingdom are here and now,
in this community gathered in this sanctuary
for worship and learning and fellowship and service.

People from all over the world,
from east and west and north and south,
gather here at Brentwood Sunday after Sunday
to come together in Christ
for praise and thanksgiving.

From that kind of gratitude arises lives of grace
that bless the world
and bear witness to the power of Jesus Christ to generate goodness
in the richest and broadest sense you can imagine.
Then, God's faithfulness will take you beyond that,
to a quality of flourishing that is truly amazing.

So, in these times of joyful worship
and in the lives that flow from them into a hurting and confused world
where every person you meet is a beloved child of God,
created to be a blessing in everything they do,
we are met and searched by the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the world
who reveals themselves in Jesus Christ as love, faithfulness, and goodness.

That, for me at least, has been the most powerful reminder
of this year of being searched by the Psalms.
Week after week, I have been searched and saved afresh
by this faithful friend who calls me yet again to flourish
in his name and for his sake.

I am instructed and equipped to be an ambassador
for the Reign of Christ in everything that I do.
In the profound rhythms of grace and gratitude
that pulse through this Psalm,
I find my true self, my true being,
my true calling
to be with Christ *this day*
in his reign of faith, hope and love.

During the coming season of Advent for 2010,
I want to design our worship services
to focus our attention on what it means for Brentwood
to live this reality of the reign of Christ realized,
of Jesus Christ *really* being alive and active in our midst.
What does it mean to be the friends of Jesus
gathered from all the world
and united in our rich diversity by our common bond to Jesus Christ.

We will be looking at some of the key passages in the Scriptures
that talk about the multiethnic nature of the Reign of Christ
and reading responsively from the prophetic insights of Isaiah,
all to discover more about what Jesus Christ is doing here
in our neighbourhood of North West Burnaby
and how we can more fully join him in that work.

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