

Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood

May 23, 2009

Meditation that Pleases God

**Ps 104:24-34 & 35b & John 14:8-17
(Hymns – 350, 644, 648, 661)**

Presbyterians have never been that big into *meditation*,
at least not by that name.
But I think the practices to which the word *meditation* points
have been an important part of our way of being with God
for centuries.

The fact that the Psalms
have been so central to Presbyterian piety
is witness to this fact.

Just because we don't call it *meditation*
doesn't mean that we don't practice it.

But what is *it*?

For me, *meditation* is about paying attention.
It is a practice through which human beings
set aside time and space to pay attention
to something that is important to them.
My big, thick *Webster's Dictionary*,
the one with 2,230 pages,
tells me that *meditation*
has to do with engaging in thought, reflection, or contemplation.
It has to do with something being intended and done,
being thought over and deeply considered.
That something often involves religious or spiritual introspection.
The Latin root for the word involves reflecting upon something.

The Psalmist, in verse 34,
connects his meditation directly with his rejoicing in the Lord.
Meditation that is pleasing to the Lord should be focused on enjoyment.
Humanity's chief end,
as our Presbyterian ancestors taught in *The Shorter Catechism*,
is "to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Indeed, everyone is rejoicing and enjoying in this Psalm –
the Psalmist in multiple verses,
God in verse 31,
and the creation itself
as it is lovingly sustained one breathe after another.
The wisdom found in all of God's manifold works
is the wisdom on joy, of happiness, of rejoicing,
all expressed when we praise the source of all being.

There are some important insights here for our understanding
of the God we encounter in Jesus Christ
and whom we come to know ever more deeply
through the work of the Holy Spirit.

First, this God sustains all the exists from breath to breath.
This is a God that is intimately and essentially involved
in continuous creation.
God didn't just make creation and leave it to run.
God is the energy at the heart of creation as it unfolds
second after second.

And our role is all of this,
and we do have a role,
is to learn God's wisdom in creation
as we praise and serve God in ways that please him.
We know from Jesus' teachings and from the Prophet's teachings
what pleases God:
love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul,
and all your strength and your neighbour as yourself (Lk 10:27);
do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8); and
I delight in steadfast love, justice, and righteousness, says the Lord (Jer 9:24)

I think it would help to reflect for a moment,
meditate, if you will,
on the role that praise plays in the Psalms.

Praise, like meditation, focuses every dimension of our attention –
physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual –
on **the** power in this universe that is alone worthy of praise
and that is God.

Nothing else comes close in deserving our loyalty and devotion –
not countries, political parties, systems of beliefs, nationalities,
corporations, or any other thing or group.
All these things can easily become idols
if we give them our ultimate loyalty.
That, for Christians, belongs to God and God alone.

In meditation and service that is pleasing to God,
we care for all those things and many more
in ways that are guided by the wisdom of God.
And that wisdom is centred on love.
Everything that is pleasing to God
stirs our entire beings and those that fill this creation
with the power and purpose of love.
That love encompasses the joy, gratitude,
serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, and awe
that enable us to flourish as friends of God in Jesus Christ,
all inspired by the subtle but sustaining breath of the Holy Spirit.

We saw with the children this morning
what God's manifold works look like in a cubic foot of this creation.
In a cubic foot of ocean in French Polynesia,
more than 600 individual creatures were found,
not counting the tens of thousands of shrimplike hatchlings
and other plankton drifting thorough on any given night.
It took the teams an average of three weeks
just to find and identify the manifold works of God
in this single cubic foot.
Each and every creature –
and these are only the ones that were larger than a millimeter –
is an integral part of a complex ecosystem
that is designed by God to enable this planet to flourish.

When we mess with this ecosystem
in ways that do not respect the wisdom of God
we have highlighted this morning,
we court disaster.
Eco, remember, comes from a Greek root
referring to managing one's home,
or being a steward of one's living space.
The damage the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico
will do to the trillions of cubic feet of water and shoreline
that it will reach over the next months is beyond my comprehension.
But I do know this.
Those responsible,
and that includes all of us who live to the degree that we do
depending on oil production from such sources,
must find a way to act differently and prevent such disasters.

We will not accomplish that by getting stuck in blame and shame.
We will move forward with grace by serving the wisdom of God
as stewards of his creation.

That is where the kind of meditation modeled in this Psalm leads.
If we are to follow this word from the Lord,
if we are to be grasped and gladdened by its wisdom,
we will become more mindful of the impact we have on this creation.
We will become more aware and responsible for the 'wake'
our living makes on this planet.
We will become more sensitive and sensible
about what we are doing to God's holy garden,
which is our home –
our living room, our dining room, our bedroom, our kitchen.

Those who decided what to include in our reading this morning,
the Biblical scholars who put together the Revised Common Lectionary
so Christians throughout the English-speaking world
would be searched by the same passages of Scripture on any given Sunday,
chose to leave out half a verse at the end of Psalm 104.
That half verse reads, "May sinners disappear from the earth,
and the wicked be no more."
I think those words should have been left in.
They are an eloquent plea to God,
a heartfelt aspiration of the Psalmist,
that the actions that damage and destroy the manifold works
to which God gives life breath after breath and in which God delights be stopped.
This is not a plea for the punitive removal of people,
but for the redemptive transformation of actions.
Stop doing sinful and wicked things
that fail to respect the wisdom of God's manifold works.

And that brings us back to our theme of meditation that pleases God.

The best way for us to transform our lives in redemptive ways,
with the essential help of God's advocate, Christ's Holy Spirit,
is to focus the attention of our thoughts and reflections
on what pleases God.

It is a simple thing to do,
but has a profound life-giving impact.
May we all, in our own unique ways, practice it more faithfully.

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