

Searched by the Psalms

Psalm 121 & Luke 18:1-8
(Hymns – 81,324, 248, 412)
October 17, 2010

The Lord is Your Keeper

Robert Davidson has an interesting suggestion on the origin of this Psalm .
Davidson taught Old Testament at the University of Glasgow.
His commentary on the Psalms – *The Vitality of Worship* –
has been one of my constant guides this year
as we have been searched by the Psalms.

He suggests that the Psalm
might be a benediction or blessing
pronounced on pilgrims as they leave the temple in Jerusalem
to return home to their daily lives.

The question that opens the Psalm –
“Where does my help come from?” –
expresses something of the anxiety of the pilgrim
as he or she sets off on the homeward journey.

The intensity of worship and learning in the temple
may very well fade as the pressures and stresses of daily life
take centre stage and demand attention.

The hills may very well be a source of danger,
robbery or attack as in the parable of the Good Samaritan,
and the pilgrims are worried about their safety.

In face of these fears,
the blessing reminds the pilgrims of the God they have been celebrating
and assures them that the promises are true,
that they are under the firm and steadfast protection
of the God who created the heavens and the earth
and protects his people at all times and in all places.

For ancient Israelites,
living in walled and armed cities and towns,
surrounded as they were by foreign peoples and foreign gods,
by strange peoples with strange beliefs,
fear would have been common.

And when we are afraid, it is difficult to love others.
That’s the bottom line in all of this.

We cannot be the blessing we are called to be
when we cower in fear in our protected little places.

So, the benediction of this Psalm
is a powerful reminder to those for whom it was originally written
and for us
that God's protective presence is essential
in giving us the courage to be a pioneering and pilgrim people.

Let's spend a moment thinking through a bit more carefully
what it means to be pilgrims and pioneers of the this new humanity.

These are the phrases that we have begun to use
in our ritual for opening our service of worship
and lighting the Christ candle.

As with Paul's first letter to the Corinthians,
we begin with an affirmation of who we are in God's eyes.
No matter how troubled or conflicted we may be in our own minds,
God sees us first and foremost as friends in Jesus Christ,
redeemed through him to be again
the agents of God's unique *shalom* we were created to be.
Paul, you will remember, described the Corinthian church this way:

*To the church of God which is in Corinth,
to all who are called to be God's holy people,
who belong to him in union with Christ Jesus,
together with all people everywhere
who worship our Lord Jesus Christ,
their Lord and ours.*

*May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
Give you grace and peace.*

*I always give thanks to my God for you
because of the grace he has given you through Christ Jesus.
For in union with Christ you have become
rich in all things, including all speech and all knowledge.
The message about Christ has become so firmly established in you
That you have not failed to receive a single blessing,
as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.
He will also keep you firm until the end,
so that you will be faultless on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
God is to be trusted,
the God who called you to have fellowship
with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.
(1 Cor 1:2-9)*

Now, we know from the rest of the Corinthian correspondence

that the Corinthian church was not being what God had gifted them to be. They were conflicted, cantakerous, careless, and collapsing as a church.

Paul's answer to these problems throughout his letters was to call them back to following the example of Jesus Christ, with whom and in whom they were united.

He called them back to their true nature as companions of God in Christ, protected and provoked by the Holy Spirit to live with courage and compassion.

This is the source of the love that casts our fear, the love that moves us to be pilgrims and pioneers of a new humanity that transcends and overcomes the boundaries of difference and invites us into a new multi-ethnic, intercultural community to flourish together in our common faith that Jesus is Lord. That, and that alone, was the bond of the earliest Christians.

Pioneers are people who successfully establish themselves in a barren area and start a new ecological cycle of life. They open the area up for enterprise and development.

Pilgrims are people who journey to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion. They often journey through difficult and foreign places in search of religious meaning and significance.

I think, from having listened carefully to all of us in dialogue with one another over this past year, that we are pioneers and pilgrims in the revitalizing of small neighbourhood churches. That is the path God has laid out for us in the coming years.

We are called to rebuild this flourishing community of the friends of Jesus Christ into a vibrant and vital congregation of 100-150 followers of Jesus. We are called to find new and effective ways to let our neighbours know the rich life made possible for everyone in Jesus Christ.

We are called to worship, learn, be in fellowship, and serve in ways that capture people's attention and attract them to join us. We are missionaries in this neighbourhood of North West Burnaby/

It may seem foreign and strange at times, causing us fear and anxiety, but it is ready to hear afresh the comfort and challenge of the Gospel.

We are called to recover our confidence in God's protection, to recover our courage to invite people to enjoy the riches of grace we find here, and to make this place a space of Christian refreshment and renewal.

Everyone here has a part in this effort.

The most important contribution you can make,
without exception,
is to pray that Brentwood will grow and flourish in its service to Jesus Christ.
Pray every day in every way for this revival of our impact
in this neighbourhood.
And pray that we may enjoy the protection and guidance of God
in all our missionary efforts.

Invite people to enjoy what we are enjoying.
Explore with us new ways of extending that invitation.
And, of greatest importance, continue to welcome people
when they come through that door.
As we will discover on November 6,
when we get together to hear Cindy's report
on the findings and recommendation from her Master's project,
the genuine and sincere welcome people receive here
is a major reason they come back and stay.

In many ways, that's about it in terms of strategies –
pray and invite,
then make sure we continue to provide people what we promise in the invitation.

By Christmas this year, we will have spent a year
building up our strength within.
Next year, we will more intentionally tackle the challenges of growth.

In everything, we will rely on Jesus Christ as our protector and guide.
Our help will come from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth,
and who guards and guides each one of us individually
through our pioneering pilgrimage to new heights of congregational flourishing.

May God richly bless us on this exciting journey.

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