

Searched by the Psalms

Psalm 111 & Luke 17:11-19
(Hymns – 434, 726, 65, 435)
October 10, 2010

Wholehearted Thanks

What a perfect Scripture text for Thanksgiving this year.
Every cell and every neuron of the author of Psalm 111
pulses with the energy of gratitude.

The reasons for gratitude are piled higher and higher,
drawing our attention more and more powerfully
to the true source of thanksgiving and gratitude
as understood by Christians.

That source, of course, is God,
the One who was with us Jesus Christ,
is for us in the work of the Holy Spirit,
and continually provokes us to be a blessing to the whole creation
in the work and witness of the church.

The Psalmist is eloquent in reminding the assembly
of the wonderful things that God has done and is doing.

Listen for the list –
kind and merciful,
nourishing in food provided,
mindful and attentive to his promises,
generous in the land and resources given to care for,
and wise in guiding his people with loving instruction
in the best ways to be a blessing.

For all these reasons, God is to be praised forever.

There are a couple of very important points about gratitude
that arise from being searched by this Psalm
that I think are worth noting this morning.

First of all, it is our of loving gratitude that understanding arises.
We have a different set of assumptions in the modern West.
We seem to think that we have to understand something first,
then we can love it and appreciate it.

It's a curious approach.

Pull something apart, analyze its parts,
identify the components we can see, touch, smell, and hear.
Only then can we understand it

and out of that understand might just grow love and honour and praise.
But there is a different, more ancient wisdom,
expressed in this Psalm
that might be worth considering,
especially if we really want to bless this world with the gifts of the Spirit –
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

The Psalm talks about being delighted with all the gifts of God
before we can truly understand them.
Love precedes true deep comprehension.

Detractors of faith rely heavily on the former means of knowing –
pull it apart to see if it really exists.
And it doesn't, because you've pulled it apart.
That's a mental exercise that is easy to do but not terribly constructive.

There is another approach.
It relies in the beginning more on our gut's intuition more
than on our brain's analysis.
Neuroscientists estimate there are over 100 million neurons
lining our intestines that show a remarkable degree of autonomy
from the head brain.
And even in the head brain,
there are parts that are driven by instinctive senses of fear or security,
not by careful analysis.
We truly seek to know deeply only that which we love most.

I think this is where our deepest sense of gratitude is rooted,
in that inner wisdom that knows before we analyze it
that God is love and we are God's.
It is the place where we find true rest in this restless world.
It is the place we find our true selves in the midst of all the external demands
to be this way and that way.
It is the place where we live with God in every breath that we take,
whether we acknowledge it or not;
where God sustains us with good things
in spite of our response to that grace.

This is the seat of wisdom and sound judgement in human beings,
that place deep within where the Holy Spirit
is constantly inviting us into the kind of gratitude
expressed in this morning's Psalm.

I have found that kind of gratitude in plentiful supply
here at Brentwood.

From what they have said,
I think others new to this community have found the same.

This is a community that welcomes people
to enjoy the gifts of grace in Jesus Christ
in genuine gratitude.

Our vitality flourishes in friendship with Jesus Christ.

More than anything, we have come to give thanks for the future.
The God this Psalmist points to so eloquently
is the God who told Moses at the burning bush,
“I will be who I will be.”

And who that God will be is seen for us most powerfully and clearly
in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.
In this human being, we Christians believe that God came
to redeem, to save, to free, to restore, to inaugurate,
to show a love that cannot be resisted when we genuinely open ourselves
to our deepest desires to flourish as human beings.

If our flourishing depended on what has happened in us and with us in the past,
we'd all be in serious trouble.
But that is not the case, even though many of us are stuck there
in the ways we see ourselves and talk to ourselves about ourselves.

The future depends on what God has done in the past –
paid his own price of righteousness in Jesus Christ
and freed humanity to flourish in relationship with Jesus Christ.
That is the future that awaits us here at Brentwood,
if we will only continue to step into it with grateful courage and confidence
and invite others to do the same with us.

So, on this Thanksgiving Sunday in 2010,
here in this place with others who seek to flourish in friendship with Jesus Christ
at Brentwood Presbyterian Church,
let us commit ourselves afresh to love God deeply enough
to truly understand his grace and mercy.

And let us commit ourselves afresh to truly welcoming others
to share that delight with us with wholehearted thanks.

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