

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, July 1, 2018 – Canada Day

**How Big Is Our God? – Introducing a Diet of Psalms
(Psalm 103)**



**Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
(Ps 103:22)**

What's the dynamic of God's relationship with us seen/heard in this psalm?

I'll confess that this is my favourite psalm – that may change over this coming year, as we allow the Spirit to 'marinate' this congregation in the rich witness of the Psalms, but for now, Ps 103 is #1 for me – it captures what I often call 'the fullness of faith' – it begins with explosion of gratitude for God' love for each and every one of us at the core of our beings – a love for all that is within us that has the potential to life with and serve God – then it pays attention to the community God chose to bless God's creation – then it recognizes that God still exercises dominion over that creation – personal, communal, and cosmic – that's how big our God is – as we are fed by the grace of that God in this coming year through the rich nourishment in the Psalms, we will constantly find that scope of God's patient and persistent love

Provocative Points to Ponder

- The idea of God's dominion has had a special place in the Canadian imagination – in the foundational period of our history as a nation, we adopted a world view that I have called, in my historical research and writing, 'providential progress' – the dominant white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant thought leaders in much of Canada were convinced that they knew how life should be lived together and set out to make that the norm for our country – and they convinced themselves that that was what God wanted – Presbyterian journalist Robert Murray* represented this view well – he captured this vision in his most famous hymn written in 1880 after he travelled across Canada with the Rev George M Grant and Sanford Fleming mapping out the route of the railway that would connect Canada from sea to sea - "From ocean unto ocean, our land shall own you Lord, and, filled with true devotion, obey your sovereign word" (#801 in our blue hymn book) – but what we need to ask ourselves 138 years on from this period is whether we really knew how God wanted us to exercise his dominion over his creation – have we been as devoted and obedient to this God who desires justice, kindness, and humility?

* Here's his bio - http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/murray_robert_1832_1910_13E.html

- Any honest answer to this question would have to be 'No' – just one example is the truth about how some of our ancestors dealt with our First Nations – the KAIROS pamphlet about how we can contribute to truth and reconciliation in our times – 'reconciliation' for

Canadian Presbyterians is a central theme – indeed, our most recent denominational statement of faith affirms that the great truth around which the Christian church organizes its mission is this = God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19) – how, then, do we contribute our gifts to that reconciliation?

- Three times a month I write a pray for an online community of Christian disciples called Casa: An Experiment in Doing Church Online – here’s the prayer I wrote on Friday, using the image of the Canadian flag on the screen – designed by Kwakwaka’wakw artist Curtis Wilson from Vancouver Island

We pray to you this evening, O Lord / deeply aware that the treasures you created us to be/ and that we still have the potential to become / are enmeshed in earthen vessels / and entangled in generations of rebellion / against your loving constraints / You created us to be little less than you / but still less / You created us to work with you in cultivating creation / but with you / You gave us astounding gifts to serve you / but still to serve you / Help us see / that our fears and angers / that our violence and victimizing / that our exploitation and excess / all arise from the rupture of our relationship with you / Help us see, simultaneously, that you embrace us / with a forgiving and redeeming love / that changes everything / In Jesus Christ, you reconciled the world to yourself / That is gospel / That is eternal life / That is justice, kindness, and humility / May your lands be peopled with friends / who find in devotion and obedience to you / the sure source of flourishing

- As the Spirit steeps us in the psalms for the next year, we will have to acknowledge how far we have fallen short of the glory/energy of God as we share in the riches of this land – God in Christ will confront and correct us with a new way of seeing things – redemption, as we have traditionally put it – I look forward to allowing the Holy Trinity to shape us into more faithful contributions to their mission of building the Commonwealth of God

Your Notes

Prayers of Thanks – for the many ways in which this land of Canada has blessed us – welcomed us, given us sustenance and success, provided opportunities for our families, offered exceptional levels of health care (specific prayers), nurtured in us a vision of justice, peace, and joy in our life together – these are important values sown by your Spirit in our history (silence to consider this)

Prayers for Help – in honing our understanding of what your dominion means for our lives – recognizing and correcting our limited grasp of your grace – opening ourselves to your continual conversion so that we orient and re-orient ourselves to serve your reconciling love (silence to consider this)

Prayers for Awe – at the opportunities and potential for blessing that you offer us every day (silence to consider this)