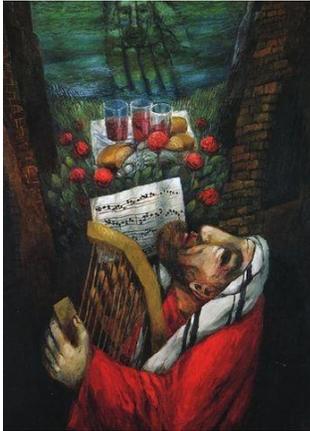


Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, July 15, 2018

Who Is It Really All About? (Psalm 115)



**Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.
(Ps 115:1)**

(Our image this morning is Psalm 23 by German priest and artist Sieger Koder. One student of his art said, "Koder dips his brush into the very essence of the Gospel and with colour describes the wholeness of human life. Thus, his art is a vibrant glimpse of the depth, the length and the width of the mystery of Christ in every person.")

A lesson from the psalm

Ours is a society obsessed with "expressive individualism" – that's the phrase McGill University philosopher Charles Taylor uses to describe the dominant value of our secularizing Western culture – the 2003 movie *Finding Nemo*, in many ways a version of the parable of the lost sheep, the seagulls caught this attitude when they fought over the scraps screaming, "Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!" – sung and spoken into our culture, this Psalm's message simply says they (and, of course, we) have got it wrong – it's not about me - it's about the creating God who wants the evolving energy of all creation to reflect that God's steadfast love and faithfulness – you (we) will be blessed when you trust in this God – our best interests on this earth entrusted to human beings are best served by serving God's steadfast love and faithfulness -

Provocative points to ponder

- The psalm proclaims over and over again that the things we make into gods (the idols we are devoted to in our attitudes and behaviours) have no life to give – they don't speak, hear, feel, walk, or even grunt – and those who fabricate and follow such gods for themselves are no better – there is only one trustworthy source of life and love and this is the Creator of the world who has entrusted this earth to human beings and seeks to guide and support them in that responsibility
- And what is the state of this earth today? – 'divided to death' is one way to describe it – our civic fabric, the way we order our common good in democratic societies, our civic institutions, are twisted, torn, and tattered beyond usefulness – that rending of our cloak of wellbeing affects every single one of us in deep and multi-leveled ways – creates trauma that we try to numb or escape through the gods of power and possessions, or of substance or people abuse – we seek our worth and wellbeing in sources incapable of delivering them – our hope is invested into things that lead only to desperation and death
- But the astounding message of this psalm is that hope lives and is found in this God of steadfast love and trustworthiness and guided and supported Aaron, and Israel, and all

those who follow the Lord – Aaron is an interesting reference – the brother of Moses – because Moses felt he could not speak well, Aaron often assigned that task – so, a true prophet – one who spoke for the Lord – that’s a key point in this psalm – we are to speak for the Lord in a culture that ignores and dismisses the source of its life and wellbeing – in a culture that creates its own gods that they think they can control – but they are lifeless and deal out only death

Finding this in God’s living Word, Jesus Christ

- Parker Palmer in Richard Rohr’s daily meditation today – the need to “reweave our tattered civic fabric” – by speaking and working with humble steadfast love with those who are wandering and bewildered and bringing them back home to serve God’s determination to bless all of creation – but the power with which this God does it is different – it is the power of persuasive love, not coercive imposition – this God’s throne room is a garbage dump outside the walls – and the throne is a cross – whenever we sing all those songs about God’s glory, that should be foremost in our souls
- So, who is it all about? – it’s all about this God who wants humans as full partners in his steadfast love and trustworthiness on earth, as it is in heaven – in that vocation, we are all blessed

Your Notes

Prayers for Help – help us recover a deep and formative faith in your glory – in the energy that feeds on your steadfast love and faithfulness to your hope for your creation – we ask for your help for all those caught up in the webs of false gods that promise much and deliver little – We remember before your healing throne of mercy and grace all those facing illnesses of any kind that disrupt their lives (silence to consider this)

Prayers of Thanks – for your steadfast reminders that you, and you alone, are the source of true life and wellbeing in this world – for the music that moves us, for the conversations that encourage us, for the insights that inspire us, for the families of all kinds that hold us in the gentle palms of their hands (silence to consider this)

Prayers of Wow – for the hope that breaks out in the midst of the most desperate of situations – for your constant searching for us in the midst of our fearful wanderings in the darkest of places (silence to consider this)

The framework and flow of thanks, help, and awe is taken from Anne Lamott’s wonderful little book on prayer, Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012).