

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Aug 19, 2018

**What Is God Up To? – Justice/Dedication
(Psalm 140)**



**I know that the Lord maintains the cause of the needy,
and executes justice for the poor.
Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name;
the upright shall live in your presence.
(Ps 140:12-13)**

A lesson from the psalm

The story was heart-rending – my friend looked into the eyes of a woman – they will filled with anger – her face was contorted in pain – her body was rigid with fear – the woman was three hours old – she had been born with a heroin addiction and was in withdrawal – I heard that story last night at dinner from our friend, Colleen Stainton – spent most of her career in Canada and Australia teaching mother/child health – she used the story to get the attention of the audience at a nursing conference where she was doing one of the keynote speeches – and, apparently, it worked - what stuck with me from our conversation around that story was the complexity of it all – on both sides of that agonizing moment – who's to blame in the past? – who's going to nurture that woman into health and wholeness in the future? – and why should we care anyway?

Provocative points to ponder

- This psalm is a lament in the face of overwhelming, debilitating evil – violence, slander, and enslavement – we don't know the grimy details, so we get to read ourselves and our situations into the poem, whatever fractured communities we are enduring
- This is a good opportunity to draw attention to the classical shape of lament in the Bible – it addresses YHWH, the God who has proven faithful in the past – it portrays a crisis being faced by the speakers – it contains a request from the speakers to that trustworthy God – and it arrives at a hopeful conclusion, based on the speakers' faith in the covenant God has invited them into –
- These psalms are brutally honest about the evil that exists around and within the speakers – it is ridiculously trusting in this God who has given and still promises to give more deliverance from the evils – and it remembers that this is a God who cares for the wellbeing of the whole of the creation and calls his covenant people to join him in that care – that is where they will find their deliverance – in join with God in deepening reconciliation through right relationships in whatever circles of influence the Holy Spirit opens us for us
- that calling within the covenant ('I will be your God so you can cultivate blessing') is what drew my attention to the sermon image for today – watering the great tree of God's peace/shalom – a tree planted and cultivated over generations before us, but needing our contributions to provide even greater benefits in generations to come

Finding this in God's living Word, Jesus Christ

- We have no idea how often God, while on this earth in human flesh in Jesus, looked into the eyes of those in need of healing – how often he saw the anger, the pain, the fear, that Colleen saw in that three-hour old woman – probably far more often than is recorded – but that is the essence of God – a love that cares and never stops cultivating the well-being of those who are suffering from evil, whatever its complex set of sources – to be reconciled with and in right relationship with that God is to be involved in what that God is up to – care for the needy and justice for the poor – we can't do it all – but we can do our part

Your Notes

Prayers for Help – for many of us, it's been a week of high expectations and discouraging frustrations – with our health, with our aspirations, with our concerns for our communities, with our hopes for making a positive impact – help us to be resilient in our hope – remind us that you are working in the world, whether we see it or not – remind us that you are working through us, whether we feel it or not – and in that reminding, help us learn how to cooperate more fully and faithfully with what you are doing (silence to consider this)

Prayers of Thanks – for those who are gathered here at Brentwood and in all the others places of worship around the world – open our minds, and hearts, and innards to the power and beauty of your grace – as those billions leave worship and go into your world where you send them, including us, to engage in cultivating your reconciling love, assure them of your care and encouragement (silence to consider this)

Prayers of Wow – create within us and among us a stunned silence at the anger, pain, and fear that distort the lives of so many in your world, but do not leave us mute in the face of such evil – help us help you in the coming of your Commonwealth (silence to consider this)

The form 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).