

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Oct 28, 2018

**How Does God Judge the World? – Justice/Dedication
(Psalm 9)**



**But the Lord sits enthroned forever,
He has established his throne for judgment.
He judges the world with righteousness;
He judges the peoples with equity.
(Ps 9:7-8)**

A lesson from the psalm

The community that revised and refined the way this psalm expressed their faith painted a compelling image of the power of God – sitting on a throne from which he judged the world – and when we think of that image, we usually think of judging the wrongs of people with a controlled and disciplined anger – but there isn't much control and discipline in this cry for God's judgment to fall on the enemies of Israel – on those who had hated them, who had troubled and oppressed them, on those who had killed thousands of them in battle – the call in this psalm is for vengeance as a sign of God's favour, as the wonderful deed that inspires Israel's praise and gratitude – if you are on our side, it seems to say, then we will praise you – but in the midst of this demand for vengeance sits vs 8 – at some level, the community gets it – God will judge in a way that restores relationships to generate justice, kindness, and humility – that's what "righteousness" and "equity" really mean in the Biblical witness – notice it's "the peoples" that are judged – plural – the whole of humanity – not just the bad guys, but all of us – not out of anger for vengeance, but out of love for reconciliation

Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- One of the things I like most about the psalms is that those doing the final edits on what gets in and how it's expressed did not eliminate the desire of human beings for vengeance – it's all through the 150 songs in a wide variety of ways – most graphically, of course, in Ps 137:9 we find the desire to dash babies against the rocks – but humans are susceptible to that depth of hatred – just think of the news from our southern neighbor this week – but can they enlist God in their cause? – can they claim they are acting as ambassadors of God in these acts of hatred and destruction? – in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, the answer is firmly and insistently 'NO!'
- So, how does God judge us? – one of the most powerful answers to this question is Jesus' story of the return of the prodigal – what he encountered, much to his surprise, was the loving embrace of his father – reconciliation with the man he had spurned and rejected – at best, he was hoping for a cleaning job – and he got a banquet fit for a king – and a brother who was outraged he wasn't at least punished or, better yet, rejected – but that's how the God revealed in Jesus judges us – with reconciling love – it happens

as the Spirit challenges our distorted desires for violent vengeance and rewires our would for healing and companionship with God

- Another thread that runs through this psalm has to do with the arrogance of those nations that forget God – there's a real sense here that they will destroy themselves through the work of their own hands – they are snared in a pattern of fear, anger, defensiveness, and destruction that threatens their very existence – what are the roles that ambassadors of God's reconciling love play in the midst of such dismissive attitudes toward the Creator, Sustainer, and Reformer of all that is? – it is to witness to and work for God's alternative way of being human – seen most clearly in Jesus, God's Christ – nourished to flourish in Christ's body, the church – desired by God to be an influence wherever we go in this world
- So, the answer to our question this morning, in a social context that desperately needs to hear and see this alternative way of being, is that God judges in love to reconcile everyone into his Commonwealth of justice, kindness, and humility – no exceptions, no excuses – just love others like God has loved us in Jesus Christ, even when it doesn't seem sensible or even possible

Finding this in God's living Word, Jesus Christ

In Brain Pickings this morning, Maria Popova featured Anne Lamott's latest book, *Almost Everything: Notes on Hope* – I think of Lamott as one of the most astute 'street theologians' of our age – a single mom, delighted grandmother, recovering addict, member of a small black Presbyterian church in northern California, prolific writer, and a very wise person who weaves instinct, emotion, and intellect into a surprising tapestry of sage advice on navigating the paradoxes of our life together – here's the quote that fascinated me most:

How can we celebrate paradox, let alone manage at all, knowing how scary the future may be — that the baby brother will grow, and ignore you or hurt you or break your heart? Or that we may die, after an unattractive decline, or bomb North Korea later today? We remember that because truth is paradox, something beautiful is also going on. So while trusting that and waiting for revelation, we do the next right thing. We tell the truth. We march, make dinner, have rummage sales to raise relief funds. Whoever arranges such things keeps distracting us and shifting things around so we don't get stuck in hopelessness: we can take one loud, sucking, disengaging step back into hope. We remember mustard seeds, that the littlest things will have great results. We do the smallest, realest, most human things. We water that which is dry.

Your Notes

Prayers of the people offering thanks, seeking help, and being awed

*[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).]*