

## Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, July 22, 2018

### Who Rescues Us from Isolation?

(Psalm 63)



**My soul is satisfied with a rich feast,  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips  
when I think of you on my bed,  
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;  
for you have been my help ...  
(Ps 63:5-7a)**

#### A lesson from the psalm

There are three crucial insights in this psalm as we consider the dynamics of being a community of faith here at Brentwood – in the order they appear in the psalm, they are: 1) humanity's need for God; 2) God's provision for humanity; and 3) the centrality of the community gathered to receive and give thanks for that provision – as this collection of prayerful songs took shape over the half century Rick mentioned last week, many of them, including this one, were honed for use in the temple in Jerusalem – that was seen to be the house of God, the home of God's people, the space where God was most powerfully present for the nourishment of his people for their mission – one came in from the wilderness experiences of life, often quite literally, to the feast of the temple, where God laid out a rich banquet that satisfied all the hungers imaginable, generating great joy in gratitude

#### Provocative points to ponder

- When we feel alone, in a dry and barren 'land,' we tend to panic – when that sense of loneliness lasts for an extended period, with no relief or help, we tend to despair – our lives are frantic or frozen – in both dynamics, we often feel isolated and abandoned – fear takes over - and laying in bed, restless and unable to sleep, is often the most fearful time of the day
- For the community that composed and refined this psalm, they acknowledge their need for God and then celebrate God's trustworthy willingness to provide for that need with abundant generosity in the sumptuous surroundings of the temple, God's house and home – come unto me and I will rescue you from all your fears through my love – indeed, my love, when you accept it, casts out all of those fears
- The attribution of this psalm to David while he was hiding from Saul and his soldiers in the wilderness adds a powerful dimension to its message – when beset by those who threaten to take away from you the life that God has given you for God's purposes, your help and rescue comes from that God, who is always with you – you are never truly alone – remember that and flourish
- Just to reinforce this point, we are rescued in order to contribute to God's Commonwealth – God's mission in the world – not for our benefit alone, but for the world's benefit – in the world's benefit, we will find our soul's satisfaction

## **Finding this in God's living Word, Jesus Christ**

- There are two 'desert' experiences for Jesus that came to mind this week as I worked through this psalm – the temptations and the crucifixion – in both, Jesus appears to be abandoned, left on his own, beset by his enemies – and in both, he was reminded of and drew upon his trust in God's providential grace as the only true source of hope and significance for God's reconciling mission in the world – Jesus is reminded that he is not alone in order to strengthen him for his mission of blessing all of creation – we are reminded of God's steadfast and trustworthy companionship for the same purpose

## **Your Notes**

**Prayers for Help** – as the institutions have supported and nourished us for generations, O Lord, struggle for survival, remind us that they were all built to provide space for the community with you and others that nourish our lives to flourish – so focus our attention on how we can work together with you to improvise and innovate new forms of that community where you can assure people afresh of your steadfast and trustworthy love – make those of our friends and families who are suffering the fear of illness, perhaps feeling isolated in that condition, newly aware of your love and healing – and help us be part of your presence with them (silence to consider this)

**Prayers of Thanks** – for the many ways you remind us, indeed, surprise us, with your rescuing presence – open our eyes to see the connections that nourish us in a smile, a touch, a laugh, a coin, a pair of socks (silence to consider this)

**Prayers of Wow** – nourish our wonder at the simple things that draw our attention to the invitations you generate for being in community and building community that breaks into the panic and despair of isolation with your word of welcome and acceptance (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).*