

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Lesson Plan for Thursday – October 17, 2013

Conversation #4 – “Sacred History Psalms”

Our objectives for this Thursday’s Conversation:

- to share personal ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to The Psalms; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to explore the importance of tradition and storytelling as ways to communicate faith to our children, grandchildren, and others;
- to locate examples of God’s mighty acts in several psalms;
- to suggest connections between God’s wondrous deeds in Psalms and our understanding of God’s great deeds in our world today.

(an interpretive note before prayer: although the printed prayer that follows is composed of portions of a familiar psalm of lament, there are several references made to God’s acts. They are called *righteous acts*, *deeds of salvation*, *mighty deeds*, and *wondrous deeds*. One of God’s mighty deeds was leading the people of Israel from Egypt and the giving of the Ten Commandments.)

A UNISON OPENING PRAYER ... (PSALM 71:1, 5-6b, 8, 15-19,22)

**In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.**

**For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.**

**Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother’s womb.**

**My mouth is filled with your praise
and with your glory all day long.**

**My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,
of your deeds of salvation all day long,
though their number is past my knowledge.**

**I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD,
I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.**

**O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.**

**So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.**

**Your power and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens.
You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?**

**I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God;
I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. Amen.**

REFLECTIONS ON OPENING PRAYER:

- Is there a verse/line in the above prayer that particularly “speaks” to you?
- Are there any words that express your personal affirmation of faith and trust in God today?

A) THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITION

Think of TRADITION as a collection of events or a body of beliefs that is communicated from one generation to another for the purpose of preserving the continuity and consistency of how a people understands themselves as having a special relationship and responsibility to God. Traditions are shared in stories, can be acted out, danced, recorded in pictures, celebrated in festivals, experienced in worship, as well as composed in prose, poetry and musical forms. We know ourselves, and are known by others, according to the stories we hear, remember, and retell. We are shaped by traditions and pass them on to others. At this very stage in life, each of us is a “link” in an endless chain that is passing traditions from one generation to the next.

If there had been no tradition to pass on ... there would not now be a people of the Old Covenant - Israel, or of the new covenant – the Body of Christ – the Christian Church.

Central to the life of the people of Israel – in every generation – was the remembering and retelling of God’s great deeds in their past (flood, covenant with Abraham, exodus, wars of victory and defeat, exile and return.) Tradition is not just a focus on the past, but rather gives a sense of continuity - a conviction that God’s mighty acts of the past will be realized and continue in the future.

These words from *Deuteronomy 26* are an illustration of tradition: **“A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷ we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”**

The above passage represents more than a story about an ancestor; it was a national and personal story of deliverance.

Likewise, central to the story of the New Covenant – the Christian Church – was the remembering and retelling of the good news of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Acts 2* illustrates this well: **a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— ²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.**

Short Reflections on TRADITION:

1. What is the difference between “history” and “tradition?”
2. In what ways does tradition help us to keep our balance in life?
3. How necessary is it to know the origin of a tradition in order for that tradition to have relevance and meaning today?
4. What traditions can you think of in your family, or in church, that are celebrated on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis?

B) PURPOSE OF THE SACRED HISTORY PSALMS:

Psalm 78, one of the sacred history or “story telling” variety, provides a good starting place since it is the only one with a prologue. This 8-verse introduction offers a reason for remembering and recalling the “glorious deeds” of God:

**¹ Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth**

² I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will utter dark sayings from of old,

³ things that we have heard and known,

**(.....purpose of this story to
explain past mysteries)*

that our ancestors have told us.
***4 We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.***

***5 He established a decree in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach to their children***

***6 that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,*** *(...passing story along to
next generation)*

***and rise up and tell them to their children,
7 so that they should set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God,*** *(...to produce trust & faith)*
but keep his commandments;

***8 and that they should not be like their ancestors,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
whose spirit was not faithful to God.***

➤ Some explicit expectations are listed in this psalm relative to those who hear the story of God's deeds. They are to:

- listen to the teachings
- tell others
- teach their children
- set their hope in God
- not forget the works of God
- keep (obey God's commandments)
- not be like their ancestors

➤ Should we expect anything less of a modern-day disciple of Jesus Christ?

➤ Might this be a "Mission Statement" for the 21st Century church/SAKLC?

➤ What synonymous words does the psalmist use to refer to the sacred story?

C) SACRED HISTORY or "STORYTELLING - NARRATIVE" PSALMS:

➤ These psalms portray YHWH's saving action in the history or story of Israel. The story/history is not related with detachment but is told as a drama that is true "for me" or "for us." AMOS Wilder (THE LANGUAGE OF THE GOSPEL, HARPER, 1964 PP. 64-65) points out that ***"some religions emphasize philosophical reflection, others mystical meditation, and still others didactic discourse, but the narrative mode is uniquely important in Christianity. It is through the story that God speaks, and all heaven and earth***

come into it. God is an active and purposeful God whose action with and for us has a beginning, a middle and an end. We are not involved in a dream with visions and illuminations; we are on a pilgrimage, a race, in short, a history.”

- As a distinct classification, there are five Psalms identified as Sacred History (“Storytelling ... Narrative”). The important thing in these psalms is their subject matter. These five psalms recapitulate the unfolding drama of dealings with His people from the very beginning of Israel’s history to the entrance into the Promised Land and – in the case of Psalm 78 – as far as the raising up of David as “the anointed one.” They recite events fundamental to Israel’s self-understanding as a people and essential to Israel’s knowledge of God’s being and character.

- Most biblical scholars recommend the following order for the reading of Sacred History Psalms:
 - **Psalm 105** – An historical summary paralleling the Pentateuch from Genesis 12 forward.
 - **Psalm 106** – A similar summary recited in a penitential mood.
 - **Psalm 78** – A summary that carries the story up to the selection of David and the choice of Mt. Zion (*Jerusalem*), again recited in a penitential style.
 - **Psalm 135** – A historical summary that includes a reference to God’s power as creator (*see especially vss. 5-7*)
 - **Psalm 136** – An antiphonal summary of the Lord’s great deeds, beginning with creation.

(an important study note – Psalms 105 and 106 are also regarded as “hallelujah psalms,” that is, each begins and ends with the cultic exclamation, “Praise YHWH.” The hallelujah at the end of Psalm 104 actually belongs at the beginning of Psalm 105. Psalm 135 is also a hallelujah psalm, while Psalm 136 is a **TODAH** [*“thanksgiving”*] **PSALM**, as is clear from its beginning and end.)

PRACTICUM: Apply the following questions as you take time to read each of the 5 Sacred History Psalms identified above.

- 1) What are the beginning and ending points in the history covered by this psalm?
- 2) In what other books of the Bible is this same period of history covered? (hint: consult scriptural footnotes!)

- 3) What are some of the connecting links that hold the story together?
- 4) What is the essential meaning or significance of this history?

INDIVIDUAL THOUGHTS/GROUP DISCUSSION: Think about God’s great deeds in the world through the centuries, and in your own life. Then, complete each of the following sentences:

In the history of the Christian Church, God has

In the life of the ELCA, God has

In the life of SAKLC, God has

In my family’s life, God has

In my life, God has

CLOSING PRAYER: PSALM 40:1-3, 6-10. [TEV] *(as we pray together, consider to what extent the spiritual circumstances of your life may be nurtured by the psalmist’s expression of faith and trust in God. When you return home, you may want to read the entire psalm!)*

**I waited patiently for the LORD's help;
then he listened to me and heard my cry.**

**² He pulled me out of a dangerous pit,
out of the deadly quicksand.
He set me safely on a rock
and made me secure.**

**³ He taught me to sing a new song,
a song of praise to our God.
Many who see this will take warning
and will put their trust in the LORD.**

**⁶ You do not want sacrifices and offerings;
you do not ask for animals burned whole on the altar
or for sacrifices to take away sins.
Instead, you have given me ears to hear you,
⁷ and so I answered, “Here I am;
your instructions for me are in the book of the Law.**

**⁸ How I love to do your will, my God!
I keep your teaching in my heart.”**

**⁹ In the assembly of all your people, LORD,
I told the good news that you save us.
You know that I will never stop telling it.**

**¹⁰ I have not kept the news of salvation to myself;
I have always spoken of your faithfulness and help.
In the assembly of all your people I have not been silent
about your loyalty and constant love. Amen.**

(PSALMS@SAKLC per hjm 2013.10)