

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Lesson Plan for Thursday – October 24, 2013
Conversation #5 – “*Psalms of Trust*”

Our objectives for this Thursday’s Conversation:

- to share some personal ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to The Psalms; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to be able to identify several psalms of trust;
- to focus particularly on the 23rd Psalm, reading it from several less familiar translations, and thereby gain a heightened appreciation of its message of trust;
- to recognize the element of trust present in other psalms of various types;
- to affirm as individuals that God is ultimately trustworthy and dependable no matter who has disappointed us or what has happened to us!

UNISON OPENING PRAYER IN TWO PARTS:

[First – An Affirmation of Trust – Psalm 27:1, 4-5 {NRSV}]

**¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?**

**⁴ One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.**

**⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.**

[Second – A Prayer of Trust – Psalm 16:5-6, 8, 11 (Good News Bible)]

- ⁵ You, LORD, are all I have,
and you give me all I need;
my future is in your hands.**
- ⁶ How wonderful are your gifts to me;
how good they are!**
- ⁸ I am always aware of the LORD's presence;
he is near, and nothing can shake me.**
- ¹¹ You will show me the path that leads to life;
your presence fills me with joy
and brings me pleasure forever. Amen.**

A) PSALMS OF TRUST

Psalms of Trust are not a “pure” type. Some scholars include them among the laments, the thanksgivings, the liturgies, or other forms, depending on the central theme of the particular psalm. However, there is such a high element of trust and confidence in God expressed in several select psalms, as to warrant their consideration as a separate type.

Psalms of Trust are affirmations of faith in God as the one who defends, protects, saves, and provides refuge. Contemporary biblical commentators identify at least eight psalms as belonging to this group: (**11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91** and **131**). Some also add Psalms **121** and **125**.

In each of these psalms there is a significant expression of trust and confidence in the Lord as the One who will protect and save the faithful people. The belief in God as Creator, and the experience of God as the deliverer of His people from bondage, then leading them into a good land, is the orienting principle upon which the Psalms of Trust are based. Because of the people’s belief in and their experience of God, the psalmists can express for themselves as well as for the people, their absolute dependence upon and trust in God.

Brief examples of Psalms of Trust: *[Good News Bible]*

Psalm 11:1

**I trust in the LORD for safety.
How foolish of you to say to me,
“Fly away like a bird to the mountains.”**

Psalm 23: 1, 4

**The LORD is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.
Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, LORD,
for you are with me.
Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me**

Psalm 27:1b

**The LORD protects me from all danger;
I will never be afraid.**

Psalm 62:2

**He alone protects and saves me;
he is my defender,
and I shall never be defeated.**

In the Psalms of Trust, metaphors like those listed below, are frequently used to express the nature of God's protection and the psalmist's confidence:

- like a Shepherd – Psalm 23
- like the wings of a hen – Psalms 63 & 91
- like the holy Temple, a place providing protection – Psalms 11, 23, 27
- like the protective mountains surrounding Jerusalem Psalm 125
- like a mother giving security to her child in arms – Psalm 131
- like a shelter, tent, fortress, rock that suggest security and protection – Psalms 27 & 91

In Psalms of Trust:

- God's actions are most often described with verbs –
protects, saves, helps, shelters, guides, rewards
- the peoples actions, in contrast, are described by verbs such as –
trusts, loves, hopes, obeys, praises

In Psalms of Trust – 2 different approaches taken by psalmists

- Prayers offered to God on behalf of the people
Psalms 16, 23:4-6; 27:7-14, 63 and 131.
- Affirmations of trust that speak about God in the third person; an expression to others about God rather than speaking directly with God
Psalms 11, 23:1-3, 27:1-6, 62, 91, 121, and 125.

Concluding thought about this introduction to Psalms of Trust: For the ancient psalmists, and for us, it was/is important to communicate directly with God expressing what we believe and feel about our relationship with the Divine One; and, to communicate with others about our relationship to and belief in God. Such communication declares who God is, who we are, and the nature of our relationship to God.

B) THE SHEPHERD'S PSALM: #23

(The translation of this most beloved of all the psalms, appearing below, is known as the AMERICAN INDIAN VERSION OF PSALM 23. It is one that you may never have previously encountered. Often, when we read something in an entirely different translation we discover things we had not seen before! Read this version silently; also, consult additional alternate translations that are found in PDF "SAKLC_PSALM23_5Versions")

**The Great Father above is a Shepherd
Chief. I am His and with Him I want not.**

**He throws out to me a rope
and the name of the rope is Love
and He draws me to where the grass is
green
and the water not dangerous
and I eat and am satisfied.**

**Sometimes my heart is very weak
and falls down
but He lifts me up again
and draws me into a good road.
His name is Wonderful.**

**Sometime, and it may be very soon,
it may be very long, long in time
He will draw me into a valley.
It is dark there, but I'll be afraid not,
for it is in between those mountains**

**that the Shepherd Creator will meet me
and the hunger that I have in my heart
all through this life will be satisfied.**

**He gives me a staff to lean upon.
He spreads a table before me
with all kinds of food.
He puts His hand upon my head
and all the "tired" is gone.
My cup He fills till it runs over.
What I tell is true.
I lie not.**

**These roads that are away ahead
will stay with me through life and after,
and afterwards I will go to live
in the Big Teepee and sit down
with the Shepherd Chief forever.**

So be it.

INITIAL DISCUSSION OPPORTUNITIES:

- Why do you think the 23rd Psalm has become such a familiar or favorite one among so many people in varying world cultures?
- How helpful are the images of a shepherd for our understanding of and relationship to God today?
- How does the psalm reflect your trust in God?

The Role of a Shepherd: Shepherding is among the oldest occupations, beginning some 6,000 years ago in Asia Minor. Sheep were kept for their milk, meat and especially their wool. Some sheep were integrated in the family farm along with other animals such as chickens. To maintain a large flock, however, the sheep must be able to move from pasture to pasture; this required the development of an occupation separate from that of the farmer. The duty of shepherds was to keep their flock intact and protect it from wolves and other predators. The shepherd was also to supervise the migration of the flock and ensured they made it to market areas in time for shearing. In ancient times shepherds also commonly milked their sheep, and made cheese from this milk; only some shepherds still do this today.

In many societies, shepherds were an important part of the economy. Unlike farmers, shepherds were often wage earners, being paid to watch the sheep of others. Shepherds also lived apart from society, being largely nomadic. It was mainly a job of solitary males without children, and new shepherds thus needed to be recruited externally. Shepherds were most often the younger sons of farming peasants who did not inherit any land. Shepherding developed only in certain areas. In the lowlands and river valleys, it was far more efficient to grow grain than to allow sheep to graze, thus the raising of sheep was confined to rugged and mountainous areas.

Shepherds were typically equipped with two tools: rod and staff. The rod was a stout piece of wood, perhaps similar to a modern day baseball bat and used to ward off the attacks of predators. Sometimes the rod was used on an unwilling sheep to break its leg. (unable to walk, the sheep learned to be totally dependent on the shepherd as it was carried around until the wound healed.) The staff was a longer slender piece of wood with a curved end. This was used to extract sheep from crevasses in the rocks, to untangle them from brambles and bushes, or to grab onto a lamb that was about to scamper off in the wrong direction. The rod was protection; the staff was an aid to give the sheep comfort.

There are several other psalms that portray God as a shepherd and the people as sheep. Among them, the example: **Psalm 80:1**

**Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth**

In these 'Shepherd' psalms, the relationship between God and the people is personal and permanent. As Christians, we are also reminded of Jesus' parable of the lost sheep (*Luke 15:3-7*) and his saying about himself: *"I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 15)*

FURTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR DISCUSSION:

- Based on the role of a Shepherd (*in the above description*) ... Must "Our Shepherd" sometimes use a rod to get our attention?
- Must we be "broken" until we learn to be dependent on Him? (*If so, count it a blessing that God cares so much for us that He is willing to carry us all the way until we are strong enough to walk with Him!*)

C) THE "PILGRIM'S" PSALM: (another view of Psalm 23!)

Often ignored in the study of Psalm 23 is the presence of a second primary metaphor. **God** is not only compared to a dependable shepherd, he is also seen as (see vs. 5-6) **a gracious host**. Both shepherds and hosts care for, protect and honor the ones entrusted to their oversight. The pilgrim on a journey to the house of the Lord (*the Temple*) is welcomed by the most gracious of hosts, God! For that reason, some scholars now also call Psalm 23 "**The Pilgrim's Psalm.**" [*The Psalms as a Book for Pilgrims* by Mark Smith, Interpretation, 4/1992]

Middle-eastern hospitality of this kind is described in an insightful paragraph in the book, "Out of the Depths" (by Bernard W. Anderson, page 183.)

"According to the Bedouin law of hospitality, once a traveler is received into the shepherd's tent, and especially once his host has spread food before him, he is guaranteed immunity from enemies who may be attempting to overtake him. In pastoral circles no human protection is greater than that afforded by the hospitality of a Bedouin chief. So the psalmist expresses trust in the good Shepherd by saying that in YHWH's tent one finds a protecting and gracious welcome. This divine hospitality is not just a temporary reprieve but a limitless protection from the powers that threaten one's existence. The host's tent is none other than the Temple . . ."

D) EXPRESSIONS OF TRUST FOUND IN OTHER PSALMS:

- Computer technology enables us to quickly determine that the word "TRUST" appears in 42 verses of 32 different psalms! Indication is that God can be trusted without hesitation or doubt! As example see Psalm 143:8

**Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,
for in you I put my trust.
Teach me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.**

- The faithful can trust in God's steadfast love ... see Psalm 13:5
**But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.**

- Trust In the holy name of the Divine ... see Psalm 33:21
**Our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.**

- Trust in the precepts or laws ... see Psalm 111:7
**The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.**

- And, trust in God's Word ... see Psalm 119:42
**Then I shall have an answer for those who taunt me,
for I trust in your word.**

In contrast, the psalmists are clear about what cannot be trusted. They are very clear about where human priorities should be in the matter of trust:

- One cannot trust in the bow or sword ... see Psalm 44:6
**For not in my bow do I trust,
nor can my sword save me.**
- One cannot trust in wealth ... see Psalm 49:6
**those who trust in their wealth
and boast of the abundance of their riches?**
- One cannot trust in abundant riches ... see Psalm 52:7
**“See the one who would not take
refuge in God,
but trusted in abundant riches,
and sought refuge in wealth**
- One cannot trust in idols ... see Psalm 97:7
**All worshipers of images are put to shame,
those who make their boast in worthless idols;
all gods bow down before him.**
- One cannot trust in false gods ... see Psalm 40:4
**Happy are those who make
the LORD their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.**
- *One cannot trust in princes or mortals ... see Psalm 146:3*
**Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.**

E) MORE IMAGES USED IN THE PSALMS TO SHOW THAT GOD CAN BE TRUSTED:

- Refuge (x45)
- Shelter
- House of the Lord
- Fortress
- Rock (x23)

- Tent ... see Psalm 27:5

**For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.**

- another way to detect the psalmist's trust is to examine psalm verses that refer to God's hearing and answering prayers One would not pray if there were not some assurance that there is a God who listens and responds to those prayers

- see Psalm 54:2

**Hear my prayer, O God;
give ear to the words of my mouth.**

- see Psalm 69:13

**But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD.
At an acceptable time, O God,
in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.
With your faithful help**

- finally we see the psalmists' trust in God when they speak to the Lord as my God ... every address to God which speaks the words "my God," is both a prayer and an expression of trust ... there are 35 psalms with 56 verses that include this personal expression of address

- see Psalm 22:1

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my
groaning?**

CLOSING PRAYER: A reading from the Holy Bible of PSALM 139:1-18

(although this is a Psalm of Lament, the first eighteen verses satisfy all of the criteria for being an expression of TRUST as we have developed that concept in this session!)

(PSALMS@SAKLC per hjm 2013.10)