

09/04/2016 - Communion Sunday
"Psalms of New Life and New Orientation" (
Scripture: Psalms 133, 146, 150

We began our traverse through the Psalms by looking at Psalms of Orientation, Psalms that orient us toward God through God's Torah and Word, and through God's Creation. In those Psalms we sought to root ourselves in the depths of God, in what God has created for us and in what God wishes to teach us through God's prophets, God's word, and the commitments we have made to others who seek the same.

Then we crossed an invisible boundary into a wilderness where the ground we thought was immovable and unchanging began to shift and change, like an earthquake of the soul. The Psalms which identify this experience are called the Psalms of Lament, or Psalms of Disorientation. Those Psalms cover the range of human experience - pain, suffering, loss, fear, death, dislocation, exile, hate.

Last week, with Psalm 22, we began to press into Psalms of New Life, Psalms of Reorientation. These Psalms are from the perspective of having come through the disaster into the other side where hope, faith, and community are once again possible.

The Psalms are not systematic in their journey through orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. They flash on those points and are meant to resonate through our communal and individual life no matter where we are. Hopefully, though, you see that the journey from orientation to reorientation requires a time of disorientation, and that Scripture speaks to that journey in many ways. We cannot go from the Garden of Eden in Genesis, say, to the New Jerusalem in Revelation without recognizing all that has happened is because we have been disoriented from the innocence and unconscious and unaware trust that the Garden evokes. We do not get to go from Jesus' birth in a manger with angels and shepherds all around to the bright glow of the Resurrection without going through the Cross.

We cycle through these points throughout our lives. And in cycling through, we begin to get a sense, through experience and gained wisdom, that God is with us, suffering with us, working through us, even when it seems like God is not there. We begin to see that we go through seasons of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. The leaves fill the trees, then fall away, then return. Empires rise, plateau, and then fall, then rise again. The birds fill the bushes, then the air gets cool, and they migrate, and then return again as the air begins to warm.

Or think of experiences in your life. We orient ourselves into a particular way of life. We get used to it and are innocent to the ways that life can change. This is what orientation is like. Then your child leaves for college, or gets married and leaves home. Your child or spouse develops a severe illness that changes your lives forever. You develop an illness. A relationship you counted on breaks down. Someone you love dies. We become disoriented; we lose our way; we forget many things. We may struggle during that time to get things back to the way they were. But they will never be the same again. And we begin to live into a new way of life. We reorient with the new way our life is now.

Orientation, disorientation, and reorientation are interlocking experiences that fold and twist over each other. They feed into each other. But this is important: In Scripture, the experience of reorientation toward God and the new life that is arising is never at the expense of the feelings and experience of disorientation. Jesus' resurrection is not at the expense of the Cross. The rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem is not at the expense of the experience and memory of slavery or exile.

What we learn, though, in this recurring and repeating trajectory in Scripture and in our lives is what the Psalms call God's "steadfast love". We begin to trust God's presence among us. The Psalms show us at least three ways God's steadfast love manifests itself in the new life God creates out of the disorientation - reconciliation, righteousness (justice), and reformation.

Psalms 133, on page _____, speaks to the reconciling love of God. Reconciliation is for the sake of community and rooted in forgiveness. Psalm 133 speaks to the present and to the future of the community when it says,

*How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity! (vs 1)*

The unity of the Psalmist's community is completely dependent on the work of God in bringing it together. This community only knows the value of community because it has lost it several times before, and a community that has been separated through violence, fear, and hate can only know how good and pleasant it is to live together in unity when something beyond violence, fear, and hate is present, and that is the love and blessings of God.

The oil on the head of Aaron in verse 2 is an image of anointing. Anointing means several things, but for our purposes today, it means the one who is chosen to speak God's reconciling love into being in the community. Think about that for a moment - God's reconciling love and forgiveness must be spoken into being. Or, to say it another way, forgiveness and reconciliation cannot unify a community or a relationship unless they are spoken. In 2 Corinthians 5, on page _____, when Paul speaks of the ministry of reconciliation that we have been given through Christ reconciling us to God, he is echoing the new life arising in Psalm 133.

As we arise out of orientation, one of the clues we are reorienting toward a new life in God is a sense of our community reconciling with itself, with one another, and with God. Reconciliation can only be present when forgiveness is the reorienting root of that community, and forgiveness is known most clearly through a reliance on God's steadfast love.

Reconciliation awakens an awareness of injustice, of unrighteousness within the community of faith. Whenever you hear about righteousness in Scripture, we need to always hear that word first as an overwhelming concern for justice. God's righteousness is known through the continued unfolding of justice reaching and extending in all directions. Psalm 146, on page _____, roots God's justice in praise and trust. When we are praising the Lord, we are praising God for what is at once present and also what is arising. Psalm 146 shows us the source of justice and righteousness is God alone. In fact, we can only rely on God for these things. In verse 3, the Psalm says,

*Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

Earthly powers and principalities cannot, in and of themselves, generate justice. Only God working through them can, and therefore it is only in God whom we can trust for justice and righteousness to arise.

Whereas God's reconciliation is experienced directly in the forgiving community gathered together, God's justice is seen in the world. Look at verse 5-6:

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
⁶ who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;*

We have returned to where we started, to Psalm 1, on page _____. Can you hear the echo in verses 1-2?

*¹ Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
² but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.*

Our perspective is different now, however, 145 Psalms in. We have gone through God's Word and Creation, have become disoriented from them, and now, in God's renewed community, we are reoriented to a new way of seeing.

So back to Psalm 146. Look at what God's justice looks like in verses 7-9:

*⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.*

*The Lord sets the prisoners free;
⁸ the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.*

*⁹ The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

This is what God does, and it is what God's justice looks like. The new life, our reoriented souls, can now see God's presence wherever freedom, sight, healing, hospitality, and care are arising. These are the markers of Jesus' reconciling, forgiving ministry as well, when he quotes Isaiah in the Temple. In Luke 4, on page _____, it reads:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.
The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them,
'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'*

We know Christ is present, we know God's righteousness is present, when these things are happening. And this is what Psalm 146 praises. We add our praises to the Psalmist's community whenever we gather together as well.

Once we become aware of the cycle through orientation, disorientation, and reorientation, we become aware, among other things, of what God desires for us. God wants us to have a fully engaged life, a life that does not abstract itself out of suffering or the suffering of others, a life that gives over the experience of suffering and disorientation to the greater story of God, as we spoke of last week. Our experience of disorientation is never at the expense of the feelings and experience itself. Instead, like the Psalmist, we wade right into the middle of the flowing waters and let them crash over us.

God's reconciliation and forgiveness, and God's righteousness and justice, are made more present by our direct, sympathetic, communal experience of engaging places and people that have become disoriented from them. In this way, we constantly reformed and renewed in our praise and trust of God.

Paul says in Romans 12, on page _____,

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The Greek here is in the present tense and refers to an ongoing, unfinished, repeating action, and so it would be better read as “*keep being transformed by the constant renewal of your mind*”. Our Christian faith and experience is not a one-time event. Jesus is continually crucified for us; Jesus is constantly resurrected for us; the Holy Spirit is continually renewing and reforming our mind and our experience.

The reorientation and new life we see in the Psalms, then, is always pressing us forward into deeper trust and praise of God. Our praise and trust of God thus is constantly renewing and reforming how we forgive and reconcile with one another in our community. Our praise and trust of God and Christ renews and reforms, over and over again, how we understand God’s righteousness and justice in the world. There is no limit to the freeing and empowering movement of God’s justice. How does the Prophet Amos put it? Look at page _____ in the Old Testament, chapter 5, verse 24:

*²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

It is this reconciliation, righteousness, and reformation and renewal that we participate in whenever we come to the table and share in the memory of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples. Here at the table we embody Christ’s reconciling love and forgiveness, God’s justice and righteousness, and the Holy Spirit’s continual renewal and reformation of our minds, bodies, hearts, and strength.

It is worthy of our trust in God and our praise of the Lord. So let’s read together Psalm 150, on page _____:

*¹ Praise the Lord!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!
² Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!*

*³ Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
⁵ Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!*

Amen!