

Last Epiphany Year C

2/27/2022

Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36

Rev. Mark A. Lafler

The songs of the Bible are primarily found in the psalter...

This 150-chapter book right in the middle of our bibles was the hymnal in the days of our Lord Jesus.

Although we often read them privately or aloud...

They are meant to be sung...

Chanted...

Often in response...

As they would even today in a Jewish Temple.

Many of them were written by David...

And many of them do not have a definitive author.

They can be categorized in different ways.

There are psalms of remembrance, psalms of wisdom,

thanksgiving psalms, praise psalms,

and a great portion of the psalms are psalms of lament.

Our psalm appointed for today is called a kingship psalm...

And this direction of the psalm is expressed in the very first words:

The LORD is King...

Psalm 99 is about the mighty kingship of our God...

His reign over the earth...

Over the nations of the world.

He rules from his throne...

Described in our first verse:

He is enthroned upon the cherubim.

Which was the title given to the ark of the covenant...

(see 2 Samuel 6.2)

On the top of the ark of the covenant were two cherubim –
a type of angel...

And in between them...

This part was known as the mercy seat...

The throne of God.

In the ark of the covenant was the ten commandments.

The ark of the covenant rested in the Holy of Holies...
in the tabernacle and then in the Temple.

The psalmist is saying that God sits upon his throne because...

God is king...

And he wants our attention.

Listen to the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases the first three verses in

The Message:

God rules. On your toes, everybody!

He rules from his angel throne—take notice!

God looms majestic in Zion,

He towers in splendor over all the big names.

Great and terrible your beauty: let everyone praise you!

Holy. Yes, holy.

God is a holy king.

He is set apart from his creation.

He is perfect.

He is holy.

Now the psalmist declares or defines God's holiness with two primary attributes...

The first is found in the fourth verse, where the psalmist writes:

O mighty King,

Lover of justice,

You have established equity;

You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

So as God reigns as the holy King...

One of the ways he operates is through his love of justice and equity.

God cares very much about the plight in our world.

The injustices of one nation over another...

Through war and violence...

But also, through economic dependence and slavery.

God cares about the wrongs in our own lives...

The pain and mistreatment that we have received by the hands and actions of another.

God cares about equity and fair play.

The psalmist sees the justice of God as an attribute to the holiness of God.

The second attribute that defines the reign of the holy God is forgiveness.

In verse eight the psalmist declares:

O Lord our God,

You answered them indeed;

You were a God who forgave them,

Yet punished them for their evil deeds.

Here we see the loving forgiveness of God...

He reigns by responding to our prayer...

A God who forgives...

A God who is kind.

Yet his righteousness is upheld...

As the evil deeds are still punished.

And this is where we see the love of God and the justice of God held together.

Love and justice are partners...

They hold hands.

You cannot have one without the other.

To love without justice is mere anarchy.

To have justice without love is to have legalism.

Love and justice go together.

They complement each other.

They are valued together.

Love and justice are both attributes of the Holy One...

The Holy King.

The psalmist declares these attributes define the goodness and holiness of God.

Three times the psalmist declares:

He is the Holy One.

He is the Holy One.

The LORD our God is the Holy One.

This thrice repeated statement drives home the proclamation that God is holy...

He is without sin...

He executes his justice...

And he lovingly forgives.

It is a reminder to us that we are in no way able to ascend to the holiness of God.

We are unworthy of majesty and glory and justice of our Holy King.

He is high above all peoples.

He is to be revered and worshipped.

And yet, we gather together on this Sunday to worship God.

As the writer of Hebrews says:

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

(Hebrews 4.16)

We don't come before God because we have accomplished so many good deeds that we can now approach him...

As if maybe, we can get his attention now because we have given to those in need.

We don't come before God because we deserve his listening ear.

There is only one way to approach God...

That is with humility...

You see The Holy God is King...

he executes his justice...

And he forgives us...

But the justice is kept established because someone paid the price for our sins.

It is the sacrifice of Jesus that makes the way for us to receive the forgiveness of God.

St. Peter writes in his epistle:

...you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

(1 Peter 1:18-19)

St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 6.23)

We call that free gift... grace.

The grace of God is the goodness and forgiveness of God that we receive...

Not something we earn or deserve.

Turning to Ephesians, St. Paul wrote:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

(Ephesians 1.4-8)

Psalm 99 teaches us about the holiness of God our King.

His holiness is carried out in his justice, equity, and forgiveness.

And we are adopted into his family by grace...

Through faith in Jesus...

Because Jesus Christ satisfied the justice of God.

(see Romans 3.21-26)

So, as we enter the season of Lent...

This Wednesday being Ash Wednesday...

A day of fasting and repentance...

A day of meditating on the holiness of God.

May we consider throughout this penitential season of Lent...

As we are more intentional about our devotion to God...

Our disciplines in the faith...

Our weakness in the flesh...

God's holiness is found in keeping justice and yet forgiving us through his Son Jesus Christ while we are being made holy because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

God does not change...

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He is holy.

He is just.

He is forgiving.

Thanks be to God.

May we praise his name forever.

Amen.