

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 90

God's Eternity and Human Frailty

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

- ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.
- ² Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- ³ You turn us back to dust,
and say, "Turn back, you mortals."
- ⁴ For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.
- ⁵ You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
- ⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.
- ⁷ For we are consumed by your anger;
by your wrath we are overwhelmed.
- ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
- ⁹ For all our days pass away under your wrath;
our years come to an end like a sigh.
- ¹⁰ The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;
even then their span is only toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.
- ¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.
- ¹² So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.
- ¹³ Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!
- ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
- ¹⁵ Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.
- ¹⁶ Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.
- ¹⁷ Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—
O prosper the work of our hands!

YOU ARE GOD

WE ARE NOT GOD

You are angry

We mess up

Current challenges – call for realism and hope. – Doug Ottati theology

As applied to prayer, belief, practice, and tradition.

PRAYER

Psalm 90 – A prayer of Moses

A “Reformed” prayer – God is God; and I am/we are NOT God.

Here is Moses looking back on what a long life of memories entails

Moses recognizes God as everlasting; a thousand years are no more than a night watch.

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, and we will be glad and rejoice all our days.

This is not a prayer we make to have things the way we want, this is a prayer to trust in what is.

God’s anger is real – because our sin is real.

Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us – best prayer of 2020.

As many YEARS as we have seen evil – maybe even better yet.

Matthew set up – 3 parables followed by 3 conflicts – 2 of them in this passage we are going to split up.

Matthew 22:23-33

The Question about the Resurrection

²³ The same day some Sadducees came to him, saying **there is no resurrection**; and they asked him a question, saying, ²⁴ “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.’ ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. ²⁶ The second did the same, so also the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ Last of all, the woman herself died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her.”

²⁹ Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because **you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God**. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ³² ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is God not of the dead, but of the living.” ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

BELIEF

Sadducees come to him saying there is no resurrection.

Why would they do that? Because belief in resurrection implies hope.

The powerful never want the powerless to have much hope, especially not in the future.

Better to make them skeptical. Better to argue about heaven than believe in it – really.

Jesus tells them they don't know their scriptures. Jesus finds proof of resurrection in the Hebrew Bible, the OLD Testament, way back in the Torah.

Didn't you know – learned men of scripture – that God is God of the living, not God of the dead? I am – the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. I AM. God perpetuates life, affirms it, creates it, honors it.

For those in power, the resurrection is foolishness. Better to get your reward right now.

But for those who believe, it is wisdom, understanding, the courage to fight for what is right.

Believing in the resurrection isn't just about securing your ticket to heaven,

No, it's about knowing RIGHT NOW that God can bring new life out of death.

Jesus's resur

rection really just affirms what is ALREADY true about God.

God continues to shape us through this pattern of radical renewal and the abundance of life.

Richard Rohr: Order, Disorder, Reorder – the pattern of the universe.

Matthew 22:34-40

The Greatest Commandment

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

PRACTICE

What do we DO to put our faith into practice: Love God, Love our neighbor as yourself

Those in power often desire law and order.

What is the most important law? How do you keep a society “in check?”

The lawyer asks this question to test him.

Will this “Jesus” follow religious law? Roman law? He and his disciples have broken both.

Jesus says- the law and prophets’ most important work is done when it focuses on love

How radically, socialist, crazy is that?

You can’t have a state or a religion based on love? Can you?

Jesus thinks that God’s kingdom is steeped in it, based on it, it’s EVERYTHING

Our practice is about doing the most loving thing we can in any given circumstance.

The Question about David’s Son

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”?’

⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

TRADITION

Question to the Pharisees – What do you think of the Messiah?

The Pharisees differed from the Sadducees in that they believed in the resurrection of the dead

They had hope, and they also believed deeply that God has a plan for the world

So when Jesus confronted them, he was asking if they could interpret their own tradition to include him

Doug Ottati always taught that it was better to have a living tradition where the dead have voice, than try to sustain a dead tradition among the living.

Semper reformanda – we may stand in the Reformed tradition, but we are always reforming

Jesus is asking about “stuckness” of tradition here

The history of our tradition is helpful – knowing the old stories, singing the old songs

But it is only valuable if it is able to inform our understanding right now

PRAYER, BELIEF, PRACTICE, TRADITION-

These aspects of our faith that we build up over time are precisely what will sustain us when times get difficult. Moses and Jesus are both examples of leaders who dug deeply when they prayed. Jesus encounters religious leaders whose beliefs and practices and traditional stuckness are keeping them and the people they teach from growing – particularly in a secularizing time when Roman power was making it difficult to expand religious truth. Jesus challenges their notions and will later denounce and condemn their desire to be honored in places of power and demanding of respect. Which is where he will say that “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

I encourage you to notice this week the themes that are in your prayers, the hope you place in resurrection, the attention and love you give to others, and the stories that sustain you. These are the gifts you receive for living a life in faith, for learning the promises of the sacred story. Amen.

Reflections – The Rev. Kerra Becker English

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