

July 1, 2018
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Third in a Series: Summer in the Psalms

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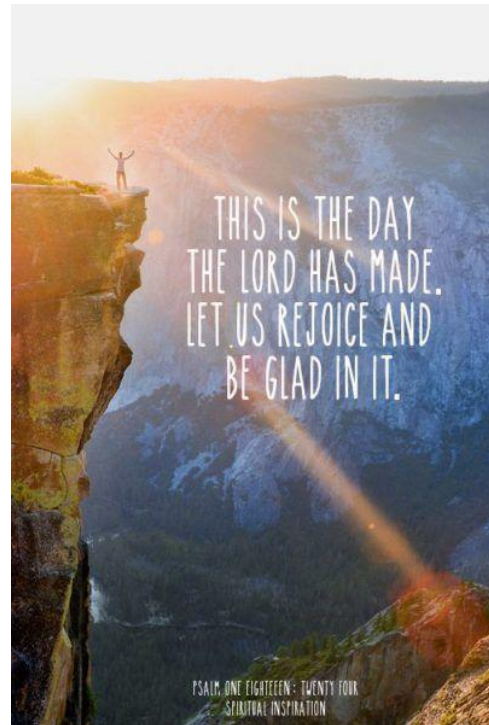
Philippians 2:1-11
Psalm 118: 1, 19-29

Give Me Some of that Kool-Aid

A Reading from Psalm 118: 1, 19-29

Listen for the Word of God

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
his steadfast love endures forever!
Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.
This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.
I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.
The Lord is God, and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.
You are my God, and I will give thanks to you,
You are my God, I will extol you.
O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.*



Well isn't that just the loveliest poem you've ever heard? The optimism and thanksgiving are oozing out of each line...praise God in the morning! Praise God in the afternoon, and PRAISE God in the evening!! I wanna drink some of that Kool-aid. See, when I was at camp as a young child, the camp director used to tell us to find the most cheerful and positive people and ask them for their Kool-aid, because that's, of course, where that positivity came from. I don't think it makes much

sense anymore, but this silly phrase has stuck with me all these years, and so I wanna know what Kool-aid was that psalmist drinking, because that is not my reality!

Because we all know there are days that the pain is so torturous that it must be God's day off.

Even as Christians, as human beings, we can have days of loss, days of pain, days when the bewilderment is too much to handle that leads us down a rabbit hole where God is left behind...where the emergency night light turns off.

What happens during this immense time of grief is a distraction from our beliefs, an interruption from our norm...a time where you wish it was as easy as “Jesus Loves Me This I Know.” Because in that grief you don’t know.

But there are numerous reasons for being distracted in our walk with God; such as money, media, relationships, and most often, grief. Money! Honestly, when are we not consumed with money; how much we're saving, how much we spent on that shopping spree, or didn't realize how much we spent, how expensive were those championship tickets for the CAPS! This tangible concept of exchange becomes so encompassing that when we find ourselves in a world of debt, we turn to dark places rather than looking to God for strength.

I don't think I need to clarify how distracting the world of media is for this modern age. Each morning no matter your generation (perhaps our older generation members can feel the escape of this distraction), we wake up and check our emails, text messages we missed, who's birthday it is on our calendar or Facebook, peruse through social media sites, all before our feet touch the ground in the morning. Then, before we go to bed, we repeat the same process. We can't sit through family dinners anymore without cell phone rules, so we are forced to communicate with our family members. And so yet again we are inching God's place out of our lives with the replacement of tangible, or perhaps, virtual relationships.

Which segues me into the next distraction perfectly. As humans we long for relationships and to be in relation with people. Relationships provide comfort and security. Knowing you are loved is probably one of the most rewarding feelings in the world. But how often do we find ourselves putting our faith in untrustworthy relationships, and then crying over a carton of Ben & Jerry's Half Baked Ice Cream because they were unfaithful to us. Again our faith was placed in something tangible that couldn't promise us happiness, distracting us from our faith in God.

But that first distraction I touched on, grief...the dark power of grief is not only undesirable, but sometimes we cannot grab the strength in our legs to stand back up. We do not choose grief. We did not choose to be a community impacted by a mass shooting. We did not choose to watch friends and family members suffer from unexpected deaths. We just have to cry out, “Where is God? Is it your day off?”

The psalmist understands the unwanted pain of despair. In a verse that was not read today (Ps 118: 12a), the psalmist cries out in distress, describes the feeling of being hated by others, the feeling of being surrounded...

*They surrounded me like bees;
They blazed like a fire of thorns.*

The psalmist was pushed so far he could not get up. The pain we may experience is real and can happen to us all.

In Walter Bruggemann's study of the Old Testament, he suggests that the psalms may be used as poetic healing grace for our pains. If the psalms provide poetic imagery for our own distress, then we can also find the answers in the responses of the psalmist. In this psalm we witness the poetic lines of human experience bringing the distressed believer, the believer who forgot about God's love, closer to God.

The psalmist says "I am no longer the stone that the builder's rejected. The Lord made me the chief cornerstone." A CHIEF CORNERSTONE. But what does it mean to be a cornerstone? According to the ever so helpful Siri, a cornerstone is the foundational base stone of the joining of two walls at the corner. Without this integral stone the building would fall apart and lose its stability.

God chose the psalmist through his despair to be the chief cornerstone. And God chooses us! God loves us! Those who are feeling abandoned and rejected by people within our community, can feel the strength of God running through them to make them the chief cornerstone. We may experience the pain that leads us away from the light of God, but God is not leaving us.

Through the psalms of victory and thanksgiving, we are shown an opening to the window of healing. Toward the end of Psalm 118, the voice of the psalmist turns from "I" to "we" ...I am experiencing pain...I am experiencing rejection. But we can feel the strength of God together. We can experience God's love forever. As the psalmist says, "God has given us light."

Take a moment and imagine yourself in a cave or room surrounded by darkness, there is no possible way of seeing the footstep before you. Now turn on the smallest of flashlights, or possibly your cell phone light, and the illuminating power of that single light gives you the guidance to walk freely through the darkness. No longer will you feel lost or abandoned, but you now have a guiding light that will illuminate your path. Imagine God as our cell phone light in our pain and distress. No matter the darkness in your life, God will always have a battery and the light turned on so you can find your way out. He will guide us through what we cannot see past. We should choose to believe in the power of God's overwhelming goodness in times of pain, because God will never break our trust or stop loving us. Money may, as it seems to do, evaporate into thin air. Social media may continue to provide a festering home for cyber bullying. People may continue to break our trust. But God is present...God has been present...and God will continue to be present. Give me some of that Kool-aid.

I want to feel empowered and lifted up like the psalmist and start each day saying. "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!" I want to hear from the choir lofts that, "God is good and his steadfast love endures forever!" I want to see a bumper sticker in traffic that says, "He gave us light, when there is darkness!" Friends, know that you are truly and wonderfully loved by God and if you don't believe me, have some of the Kool-aid. I hear you can find it in the Gospel. Amen