

The Book of Psalms is a book of poetry, which was used as the “prayer” of “service” book in the ancient Israelite Temple. Composed of 150 poems, Rev. Eugene Peterson writes that, they form are a “prayer book that gives us a language adequate for responding to the God who speaks to us.” They can teach us how to pray. Psalm 100 is a typical hymn of praise. It was probably sung at the entry into the temple in connection with a thanksgiving ceremony.

Noted Old Testament Scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests (in his book *Praying the Psalms*) that the psalms reflect two very basic movements in everyone’s life. The first is the move into the “pit”. This happens when our world collapses around us and we feel that there is no way out of the deep hole into which we have sunk. The second movement is that out of the pit into a welcome place. We suddenly understand what has happened and who has brought us up out of the pit. Dr. Brueggemann advances that as human beings we regularly find ourselves in one of three places:

1. a place of orientation, in which everything makes sense in our lives;
2. a place of disorientation, in which we feel we have sunk into the pit; and
3. a place of new orientation, in which we realize that God has lifted us out of the pit and we are in a new place full of gratitude and awareness about our lives and our God.

Using these three “places,” Brueggemann suggests that life has a rhythm as we move from one place to the next. He believes that that psalms match those places and the surprisingly painful and joyful moves we make. In short, there are psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. Recognizing that different psalms match these three places in our lives can help us identify psalms that fit our personal lives and which may provide us with the language we need to pray and live from a place of faith, whether we are in the pit, or in a “welcome place.”

[In] **his presence**:: לִפְנֵי פָנָיו In Hebrew the word PaNaH literally means before his “face” – the notion of being with God is seeing God’s face. Think of the stories of Moses seeing the backside of God and being forever changed in Exodus 33:12-23 and Elijah witnessing God pass by the mountain top in 1 King 19:1-15.b

bless his name :: בָּרַךְ [barak]:: to kneel, **bless**. Derived from the word for “knee” it literally means to kneel down to receive a blessing, or to bestow one (give praise). שֵׁם [shem] :: **name**. It’s common in the Hebrew Scriptures for the writers to replace the unpronounceable name of God (Yahweh) with the word his Name, or the Name - in Hebrew Ha-Shem (הַשֵּׁם). This is what we see here. It’s a sign of respect of God’s holiness by not overusing the Divine Name.

the sheep:: this is a common metaphor used in the poetry of the Psalms and the Prophets to talk about the relationship between God (the shepherd) and the people (the sheep). You can find it in Psalm 23; 79:13; 95:7, Ezekiel 20:37-38; 34:31; Zechariah 11:16-17. It’s later used in the Second Testament to talk about the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, see Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18.

his steadfast love endures forever: This is a liturgical refrain used repeatedly throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to elucidate God’s unfathomable love. See Psalm 118:29; 136 (in particular); 1 Chronicles 16:34.

gates | courts :: this refers to the gates of the Temple entrance and the courtyards within the edifice. Hence why scholars think it was sung during the entrance into Temple for a service or ceremony.

SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 6.11.2017

Psalm 100 & John 1:1-5, 14-17

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Psalm 100

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

¹ Make a joyful noise to the Lord,
all the earth.

² **Worship** the Lord with gladness;
come into **his presence** with singing.

³ Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us,

and we are his;

we are his people,

and **the sheep** of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his **gates** with thanksgiving,
and his **courts** with praise.

Give thanks to him,

bless his name.

⁵ For the Lord is **GOOD**;

his steadfast love endures forever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

The book of John is one of the four gospel storytelling accounts of the life, work, words and person of Jesus of Nazareth. Of the four it's believed to be the last written as the language moves beyond merely relating what happened to including significant development of metaphorical language and interpretive narration within the story. John's gospel soars in poetic Greek recitations of the Hebrew Scriptures, in particular the creation story of Genesis 1-2, situating Jesus as the right hand of God from the beginning of all things and time.

We read from the first chapter of John today, which opens the gospel story of the life of Jesus, using and tweaking the language of Genesis 1 and 2, asserting that Jesus is the image of God in the world from the very beginning of time. Jesus is presented as infinitely involved in the first breaths of creation, right up through his full life within the world which John asserts is too lengthy to record.

WORD: Λόγος [logos]: a word, being the expression of a thought; a saying, utterance, conclusion, work, question, preaching. .

In Greek philosophy and theology, the Logos (WORD) is the divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering it and giving it form and meaning. The idea of the logos in Greek thought harks back at least to the 6th-century-bc philosopher Heraclitus, who discerned in the cosmic process a logos analogous to the reasoning power in man. It was used significantly by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and here is used with that deeper philosophical sense describing or defining the role of Jesus Christ as the principle of God active in the creation and the continuous structuring of the cosmos and in revealing the divine plan of salvation to humanity.

overcome: κατέλαβεν [katelaben] meaning both "to comprehend" and "to overcome". Here it implies that the darkness cannot fathom the intelligence of the Word/light as well as prevail over the power of the light.

John 1:1-5, 14-17

¹In the beginning was the **WORD**, and the **WORD** was with God, and the **WORD** was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.

³ All things came into being through **HIM**, and without **HIM** not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in **HIM** was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not **overcome** it.

¹⁴ And the **WORD** became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen **HIS** glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

***What strikes or shimmers for you in this passage?**

***When have you heard this psalm before? What do you think the Psalm is saying? If it's a prayer/poem book for the people of Israel as they come to worship, what truth, hope or belief it is affirming? Is it a message intended for someone who finds themselves in "a pit" or someone who finds themselves in "a welcome place"? What words or images in the poem-prayer do you use in your own prayer life, whether spoken aloud or imagined in your imagination?**

***The gospel of John begins with this soaring hymn proclaiming the preexistence of Jesus as the divine Logos (word, idea, concept, or work) which not only holds everything together today, but has been the glue with which everything was made. How do you experience Jesus as the glue that holds your life together?; our world together? How do you see that in your life – or our world – today? How do you struggle to see it?**

***How does trusting that God is our shepherd, that Jesus is the Logos that holds creation together give you hope today? What might you need to let go of in order to make room in your heart, or imagination, for this hopeful truth of God's intimate presence take root in you?**

***How do you struggle to pray or talk with, or about God? What new language do you need to acquire to do so?**