

God has blessed us, A sermon preached on May 1, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons:PSALM 67

REVELATION 21:10, 22:1-5

JOHN 1:14-16

It is a very short Psalm Faith just read.

A Psalm originally set to music – so says the subscript

Another clue that this Psalm was to be sung is the word **Selah** which appears at the end of verses 1 and 4

The specific meaning of the word is unknown. However the most widely accepted interpretation by scholars is that the word refers to some sort of musical notation – perhaps a change in the tone of the responsive chant

Like moving an arrangement from a major to a minor key – lifting the voice up

The Psalm reflects the blessing that the Aaronic priests (those descendants of Aaron – Moses' numero uno)

Were to pronounce on Israel.

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face shine on you, and be
gracious to you,**

The Lord lift up his countenance on you, and give you peace [Numbers 6:24-26]

It is also a Psalm rooted in God's covenant promise

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed [Gen. 12:2-3]

It is as well a Psalm that continues to be worked out as each of us ponder on that 16th verse of the opening chapter of John's Gospel

From his [God in Christ] fullness we have all received grace upon grace [Jn 1:16]

Sometimes though we do not feel blessed do we? Asking for and speaking about God's blessings sometimes seems like just so many words

Talk, talk, talk

The tyranny of the immediate becomes the default position in our lives

Fear of the future,

Regret of something in the past causes us not to live in the here and now, but with the "if onlys" and "what ifs".

An old hurt and an unhealed memory can too easily determine how we live in the here and now.

A sense of forgiveness, living as God' forgiven people just does not seem as if it is 'for us.

I wonder if everyone in the groups that have sung this song since it was written say it with an upbeat, hopeful, gosh it's great to be alive way

I wonder how many Eeyore like people were peppered throughout the praising, grateful and thankful group

You know the Eeyore sort – those are convinced that they are not worthy of God's blessing
Those who are convinced that only bad things happen to them

Those who when something good happens, are waiting for the bad

Those who are never content with what they have, but are preoccupied with what they do not have!

Look, the life of faith is not always smooth sailing.

Life is difficult – whether you believe and entrust your lives to the presence of the Risen Christ or not.

And it is for this reason that Psalm 67 needs to be sung more than just a few times in our lives.

For Psalm 67 affirms that no matter what the immediate circumstances around us may lead us to conclude,

God's is the last word

And that word includes the promises of blessing, saving power, praise, equity, guidance and increase.

Don't want right now to sing this Psalm with the hopeful tone in which it is written?

Okay!

Then listen, just listen as it is sung around you

Listen to its promises

Don't walk away or disengage in your head or your heart.

Be bold!

Take a chance

Be willing to say – maybe, just maybe there is something here in this Psalm that I desperately need to hear right now!

Be like the prophet Samuel who thought he heard the voice of God, but at first dismissed what he heard as impossible

After a few more times, God finally got Samuel's attention and Samuel came to that place where I believe we all must come,

If faith in the Risen Lord is to be more than words on a page

Speak Lord, your Servant Samuel IS listening!

To those who say,
 Blessing?...God?...don't know
 What have you got to lose?
 Not much, compared to knowing that this Psalm
 when it is absorbed into our lives opens us to a
 fresh and eternal set of priorities in life that we
 can barely grasp!

But, first, there are some things you have
 to do
 We all have to do –to enter into a heartfelt singing
 of this Psalm in our lives.

*Intentionally and repeatedly find ways; learn
 ways to recalibrate your view of your place in this
 world.*

The Creation does not exist for you alone
 You are not the centre of all things.
 All things do not depend upon you

A minister's widow who was very
 important as a mentor once said of another
 minister

“Heightened sense of their own importance”

Early in my own ministry, I was told a story
 about a colleague and his wife driving home from
 an anniversary service at which the colleague had
 been the guest preacher.

At the conclusion of the service, when
 greeting people, he had received many glowing
 comments about his message,

His delivery,
His presence that morning

As he and his wife headed home, he was still basking in the glow of the morning and was obviously full of himself

Triumphantly, he said to his wife, “Do you know how many great preachers there are in this denomination?”

With only a brief silence, his wife affectionately patted his husband’s knee – “One less than you think there are, dear”.

It was not a comment meant to hurt or summarily deflate.

Rather, it was a comment meant to bring her husband back to reality.

I have never forgotten that story and its meaning.

I do not believe ministers are the only group who sometimes suffer from a heightened sense of their own importance – I just know better the temptations in this work to allow one to believe that they are in fact the centre of all things

To sing this Psalm is to be firmly reminded that none of us is the centre

For the subject is not us – it is God

In fact the whole of scripture is in essence God’s response to us – who are PART of God’s creation.

That verse contained in this morning's reading from chapter 1 in John's Gospel.

From his (God in Christ's fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (Jn1:16)

Cultivate an attitude of thankfulness and praise for what you have.

The world in which you and I live has many strident voices clamouring - "you are entitled, you deserve this",

"You are owed that."

Psalmist does not say, "God, give us what we deserve"

That would be a huge mistake to pray for – for the scriptures repeatedly tell us that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Reality check – GOD DOES NOT OWE US ANYTHING

If we deserve anything from God, it is to die immediately and be separated from him for eternity

For how often we ignore, or spit in the face of God by our disobedience and mulishness to follow his ways which are ultimately for our good and protection?

That is what we deserve, but that is not God's way

His way is echoed in the opening verse of Psalm 67

**May God be gracious to us and bless us
And make his face to shine upon us (vs.1)**

I wonder what it would be like if each of us could appropriate and absorb and show that truth in the whole of our lives – not just some of the time, but ALL THE TIME.

That truth that we DESERVE NOTHING.

I wonder would it change our mindset and attitude to one of continual thanksgiving.

For if you realize that you deserve NOTHING, then whatever you receive you are thankful for.

I wonder how our lives would change if in responding to the question,

“How are you doing?”

Our response could be, “I am doing better than I deserve.”

Having that attitude could well create new givens in so many areas of our lives

--attitudes toward our circumstances

--attitudes toward our spouse and family

--attitudes toward God

It is not a matter of what we ‘deserve’ – whatever God gives us is of HIS GRACE

May God be gracious to us and bless us – is the prayer.

And He is just that – gracious

If you act if you do not have ENOUGH or are obsessive in your thinking of those things to which you believe yourself entitled – you WILL miss God’s lavish generosity.

Know that God’s blessings in whatever form they take are not for you to hoard or yourself.

The blessings of God are to be shared

That is a theme that runs through Psalm 67

How are we to acknowledge God is the source of all our blessings if we never speak of them?

How are others to see a blessing of God if it is kept hidden away?

This is not a call to holy triumphalism, At the same time, it is not to be excuse me for living when it comes to seeing and acknowledging in our lives the ways in which we (each of us) have been truly and lavishly blessed by God’s goodness and love.

With every gift or blessing God gives us, I believe we need to ask and answer for ourselves –

WHY did God give me this?

WHAT does He want me to DO with it to further his kingdom here on earth.

For example:

If God gives you a blessing of a good mind and the ability to communicate well, do you think

God did this just so you could make a lot of money?

Or is your mind and ability to communicate to serve him in some capacity – to perhaps be a Christian presence as hospital or palliative care volunteer,

Or as a volunteer in a large or small scale community event.

To be the best and most reflective of the ways of the Lord in whatever your chosen profession or calling.

If God gives you the blessing of being able and circumstances allow you to make very good money in your life,

Do you think God did this just so that you could enjoy for yourself every creature comfort in this world?

Or is your worldly wealth given to do the 'right things' in this life – to help people – often without every thinking as to whether you can get a tax credit

To serve not for profit agencies.

The opportunities to share with others,

To be gracious with others,

To give to others – are endless

Each time we do this we are truly reflecting the lavishness of what God has given to us

It is a great Psalm for it pulls us away from seeing the siren voices of the world as the only voice.

Voices that will repeatedly tell us – it's all about us,

All things exist for us,

We deserve it – whatever "it" is

It is a Psalm that refocuses us to acknowledge, to celebrate and to give thanks – profound and humble thanks for all that God continually to lavishly give us

The call and the challenge remain to live daily in the light of this giving and lavish God – especially when we don't feel like it!