

5/1/2011

THE PSALM AND THE CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 16:6-11

Lay Minister: Christ is risen!

People: He is risen INDEED. ALLELUIA!

Lay Minister: 6 The boundary lines

People: have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

Lay Minister: 7 I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;

People: even at night my heart instructs me.

Lay Minister: 8 I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

People: 9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

Lay Minister: my body also will rest secure,

People: 10 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

Lay Minister: 11 You have made known to me the path of life;

People: you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Lay Minister: We begin our worship, called to joy in the presence of God, to eternal pleasures at His right hand.

People: We begin in the name of God the Father, and in the name of God the Son, and in the name of God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lay Minister: He is risen!

People: He is risen INDEED. ALLELUIA!

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE EPISTLE LESSON

1 Peter 1:3-9

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(Peter tells the church how suffering works for witness and praise.)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

(The story of Thomas helps us see God's grace in our times of weakness.)

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

INTRO - In 1983 I was pastor in Jacksonville, FL, but starting a church about 30 miles north in Kingsland, GA. I visited people who *were* Lutheran, or had an interest in a Lutheran Church. One lady said she was really interested, but our services were at the wrong time. Actually, we changed our time from evening to early morning. She still didn't attend. So, I asked her about church and she said, "Pastor, when I lived in Groton, going through military training, I became really good friends with another sailor. We talked every day and did everything together. But she was transferred in one direction, and I came here. Losing my friend hurt so much, I don't want that to happen again. I'm not sure I'll be at church. If I come, I won't get involved. The lady was hurt so much by her friend moving that she wasn't willing to risk possibly being hurt again. Somehow she couldn't trust the love of the church, or the love of God, could overcome the hurt of leaving friends.

I. This sounds somewhat like Garrison Keillor's description of Norwegian bachelor farmers. Speaking with tongue in cheek, he says, "They hope for the best . . . BUT expect the worst. The problem with this attitude, in Norwegian Bachelor Farmers or in others, is that when God acts, or when good comes, sometimes people can't or won't see it.

A. We might ask, tongue in cheek, Was Thomas Norwegian? The bachelor Farmer type?

1. "No, Pastor, don't be silly. He was Jewish."
2. But, Thomas does exhibit the same kind of attitude.
3. Jesus had risen. The other disciples told Thomas. But, he had been so hurt he did not want to hurt again. So, even though Jesus had risen from the dead, Thomas said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hand, and put my hand in his side, **I will not believe. I WILL NOT BELIEVE!**"

B. In this world of selfish behavior by ourselves and others, we have all been hurt.

1. No one wants to get hurt again. So, we can be cautious. We can act like a Garrison Keillor 'Norwegian Bachelor Farmer,' expecting the worst.
2. In one way Thomas' hurt wasn't anything HE did, after all he didn't crucify Jesus. In another way, Jesus had told the disciples he would be crucified, and would rise again. Thomas forgot that. So whether it was Thomas's fault, or not, Thomas was hurt, deeply.
3. The problem becomes that when we don't want to be hurt so we don't trust God. So, even when God acts, or promises to act, as in Thomas' life, we can miss it because we don't trust His love.

C. A couple of years ago I met someone, and they asked what I did for a job. But as soon, AS SOON, as they heard I am a pastor this person told me, "I don't believe in organized religion." There are many people who have been hurt through their interactions with the church. Often these folks are invited to come and see for themselves and experience God's presence. But, once hurt, it is hard to believe you won't get hurt again, or even that something good can happen, even if God can work good.

1. There are many ways that God's people have been hurt, so they don't trust that God's love is more powerful than the hurt, like Thoms.
 - A. Some have been hurt by someone whom they cared about. It is not only tough to forgive, it can be tougher to trust that person again.
 - B. But, this also includes not believing God is bigger than the hurt, or can help us forgive.
2. Doubts about God's power or love can not only keep us from believing in God, but keep us from serving Him.
 - A. Yes, Lord, I know you call me to 'Make disciples of all nations', BUT, sharing your love with my neighbor might make him think I'm weird.
 - B. Yes Lord, I know you call me to give as you have blessed me, BUT, will I really have enough?
 - C. Yes Lord, I know you call me to serve others, BUT, who will take care of me.
 - D. Yes, Lord, I know you call me to love others as you have loved me, BUT, those folks have NOT always been loving to me.
3. You see, previous hurts lead to doubts. But, when we doubt, and it can be in many areas, it can keep us from serving the Lord, and keep us from receiving Love already there.

II. So, does God want us to always be an optimist, to expect good happens all the time in life? No. I've seen too many people expect good and go foolishly into a situation. Yes God want us to love others. But, that does not mean, for example, that it is wise to marry someone that we expect to fix. That does not work. Many have that optimistic attitude that everything will work out, when we see reasons it won't.

A. We live in a world of sin.

1. We and others have caused hurt by our selfishness.
2. We should expect that there will be difficulties and pain in life.

B. God does not call us to be unwise, ignoring the fact of sin.

III. In Kingsland I also met a man who had been hurt years ago when his pastor had acted in a sinful way. But, even though hurt he trusted God's love, and God's forgiveness. When we started the church he became one of our most active members. He knew God's love is stronger than life's hurts, so he served. God is stronger than Thomas' hurts, Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed, Jesus is stronger than our hurts, so we can trust Him, believe, and serve.. Jesus doesn't call for optimists, He calls for faith. **Blessed are those who have not seen but yet have believed.**

A. God calls us to trust His word. Jesus had told the disciples he would rise, and he did, even though it did not make sense.

B. God calls us to believe his promises.

1. In His word God tells us He forgives us, even when our sin hurts us so much, forgiveness seems hard to believe.
2. In His Word God says he is with us, even when problems, disasters, and accidents do occur.
3. In His word God tells us He has heaven waiting for us, even when our life is falling apart.

C. It can be hard to believe God, and to serve God, because we have been hurt.

1. But God is stronger than our sin and doubts.
2. His love is stronger than our hurts, especially when Jesus rose.
3. When God calls us to serve Him, we can do so, not because we optimistically think there will be no problems, but, because we believe in God and know His promises are true.

CONCLUSION - In 2004 The Red Sox won the world series for the first time in years, as one born in Massachusetts I watched. It wasn't easy. In the playoffs they had lost 3 games to the Yankees and won none. No one has ever won when they were down 3 games to none. But, they did win. In the stands there was a sign.

Thomas' doubt is sometimes described as "seeing is believing." Until he saw he doubted. However, the sign at the game said 'Believing is seeing.' That's actually what happens when we believe in God promises and love. We see his love in our lives, and we can serve Him.