

Psalm 25:1-10 I Lift Up My Soul

The Old Testament reading for this morning is from the Book of Genesis, chapter 9, and is about Noah, when the ark landed and God made a covenant with him; promising never again to destroy the earth with water. The sign of the Noachic Covenant is, of course, the rainbow.

The epistle reading is from 1 Peter 3 where Peter alludes to the Ark and likened it to baptism, “not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God.

Furthering this theme, the gospel reading is from the Gospel of Mark and is the scene of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan, when the sky was torn open and the Holy Spirit came down like a dove and God spoke blessed words of acceptance to Jesus whose eyes were facing upwards.

And now we are the season of Lent, when we observe the lengthening of the days as springtime approaches. Every year when the temperature rises and the grass turns green and the flowers bloom and the leaves come out on the trees so that eventually one can even think of going outside without a jacket or a hat and gloves, we also observe and celebrate the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ; the coming of new life. As the earth renews itself, we anticipate eternal renewal.

As the earth’s cycle involves dormancy, and kind of death, we are also reminded that nothing can be raised to life unless it has first died. Even Jesus in John 12:24 says,

“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

This is the time of dying, a time of repentance, in anticipation of resurrection. In terms of baptism, this is the time just before one is submerged, covered over by the water, dying with Christ, so that one may also be raised up.

Psalm 25

Thus the 25th Psalm, which is a part of a group of psalms that are known as “penitential” psalms, used in worship to help people give voice to this aspect of their faith, that confession of sin and denial of self is a rightful preparation to receive grace.

The psalm begins with an expression of faith,

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. In you I trust O my God.” It is a confident statement that God is worthy of our trust. “Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths,” guide and teach, my hope is in you.

And then there is confession. The psalmist prays that God remember love and mercy but not the sins of youth and rebellious ways. He goes on to ask for forgiveness, that God would take away his anguish and guard him because he has put his hope in God.

Suggestion

This is the season of penitence. There are some suggestions:

1 - Don't do it alone, that is what our worship services and bible studies are meant to help with, because it is easier together with others than in solitude. I learned this as a runner. I ran individually, but it is much easier with others.

2 - Let the psalms like the 25th and other scriptures give words to your prayers. I know how hard it is to pull words out of the air or wherever else it is from which they come and give order to otherwise rambling and disordered and ambiguous thoughts. Let God's Word give the words.

3 - Make use of the visual aides we have been given. The coming of spring, you will notice it as the days go by. The concept of baptism helps. It challenges us to think of how our lives might be different if we had not been baptized. It allows us to remember our own baptisms. It reminds us of its meaning. It represents dying and being raised to new life. It represents inner

cleansing. It represents being wholly involved in God's life; not extracting out the parts of our lives and selves we think are not suitable.

See this time as a time of rising up out of the waters and looking at the sky.

4 - Do not be distracted by the task of "lifting up your soul" to God. I realize, and so does the bible, that the downcast soul is unable to lift itself up. It must be lifted. The lifting up of soul is not something we do but something that happens to us. We are passive, not active, in this endeavor. Yet the psalmist says, "I lift up my soul."

Perhaps we would be helped if we understood that there *is* such a thing as a middle voice, somewhere in between active and passive, in which the subject participates in the action that is being imposed upon it. At the same time we are lifted, we also lift ourselves. Paul wrote,

"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you."

The Destination

5 - And keep the destination in mind. In the psalm we find words like forgiveness and love and mercy and redemption and truth and righteousness. These are high and lofty words. He writes of the one who fears

the Lord, “He will spend his days in prosperity and his descendants will inherit the land.”

While a promise of earthly wealth is inconsistent with the larger message of the bible, it is clear that we are headed to heaven, where we are promised spiritual rewards; peace and joy and love, no guilt, for it has been removed, as it is put in the vision of the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse, “no more tears, or mourning or crying or pain, and no more death, for the old order of things has passed away.

It is a sublime vision. Sometimes the best we can do is think of the most beautiful things we know on earth;

The sight of the ocean or a mountain vista. The warmth of the summer sun or the dazzling colors of flowers in springtime, the oz-like green-ness of the grass and the trees.

One might also think of the best experiences of life; the making of the friend or maybe a romance, birth, the sound of children playing, growing, learning; the achievements of excellence like those we enjoy watching in the Olympics. Beautiful music and art.

All these things are but dim shadows of the eternity that awaits, and like the rainbow in Noah’s sky, or the dove at the baptism of Jesus, once we catch a glimpse we strain to see more.

In spite of whatever works to bring us down or distract us, whatever ugliness, trouble, failure, whatever ; we find the strength to point our gaze upwards at the spectacle, realizing that all we can see is but a small piece of the great heavenly extravaganza, and can, by a miracle of grace, join with David and Noah and all the others that have come before us, and say,

“To you. O Lord, I lift up my soul.”

And we are lifted up.

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