

Psalm 4

Greater Joy

I was watching a baseball game on ESPN the other day. It was in St. Louis and I kept it on for a few minutes just because it is my hometown team and not many of their games are on TV here in Ohio (although they will play the Indians and the Reds at various times this season).

They were conducting an in-game interview with Cardinal pitcher Adam Wainwright, who was not pitching that day, and he engaged them in a rather interesting conversation. He refused to talk to them about baseball, but wanted to talk about farming instead. Apparently he owns a farm in Georgia and is learning how to grow various kinds of plants and also how to prepare them to make tasty and healthy dishes.

They asked him about some of the young talent on the Cardinals team and he answered about okra and spinach (which he said he couldn't stand to eat) and corn. They asked about pitching strategy and he mentioned a player on the other team (the Brewers) who also owned a farm and when they play against each other they always get together to talk about farming.

At one point they stopped asking him baseball questions and started asking about garden recipes and other fruits and vegetables, all this while the game was going on and the Cardinals scored three runs, at which

point he added that he would only talk about plants until the Cardinals stopped getting hits.

They were all laughing, as so was I because like a politician dodging questions he had distracted them from their work. It was delightful. He had drawn them into a discussion about plants that grow and can be transformed into pleasing nourishment as well as laughter.

Psalm 4

“Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress, be merciful to me and hear my prayers,” is the way the 4th psalm begins, a prayer that recognizes the distress associated with human life.

The psalm teaches the futility of the human obsession with taking what from God is glorious and making something shameful out of it, with the love of delusion and the seeking after lesser gods. And the prayer comes from one who looks out into the world of human things and can't see anything good.

The prayer, however, is not a despairing one, but confident and hopeful. It tells us not to sin in our anger. It may have well said;

In your self-concern, do not sin
In your little-faith, do not sin

In your resentment, do not sin
In your pride, do not sin
In your fear and, do not sin.

It gives us suggestions for the health and maintenance of our faith. "Search your hearts and be silent." Silence is *not* one of the modern world's strengths. The world, of course, is never silent, but this kind of silence means that from time-to-time we should stop making noise and listen; turn off the TV news, or the crime drama or whatever it is you like to watch; or turn off the cell phone, the internet, the music.

I was not trained to always have the devices playing, but there are many who never have them off, not while they eat or sleep or work. But from time-to-time, the psalm suggests, we should be silent, at least we ought to stop talking. It is good for us to be quiet and listen.

Easter

The psalm comes to us on the 3rd Sunday of the Easter season, A Holy Day that been celebrated for close to 2,000 years. Just *that* we celebrate it every year signifies that we still live in a world characterized by sin and one still basically untransformed.

For we must observe Easter in the full knowledge that the victory of the kingdom it proclaims has not yet fully manifested itself in time. Not only our world but we ourselves are still untransformed. Sometimes it is hard

to see any difference at all between the time before the resurrection of Jesus and the time after it.

But something has changed. In the reading from Luke's Gospel, there is an emphasis on repentance and forgiveness, which only makes sense for a people on whom God's light has shined. Easter is the divine light shining upon us.

At Easter, though we still have questions because the human race is still vulnerable and there is much pain in the world and everyone still dies at the end of this short life, the whole situation has turned sunny because God has caused the sun to shine upon us and given the gift of a life filled with joy and peace.

Greater Joy

We live our lives out of the same faithfulness that we find here in this psalm. While there is an acknowledgment of distress and sin, and even a questioning of the goodness of things; we also find a firm confidence in God's faithfulness, that God hears prayer, and has provided for those who respond in faith, that God's blessings are accessible to those who seek them even when seeking means meditating in silence, and questioning, and trusting in what is not visible.

And that confidence is like Easter in the soul. It turns into the simple prayer that brings the psalm to a close,

“Let the light of your face shine upon us O Lord.” And somewhere along the line the turn comes, if not in the external circumstances, then inwardly, when upon reflection one also acknowledges the psalmist call a greater joy, greater than the plentiful harvest when the “grain and new wine abound.”

By this demonstration of faith in distress I am reminded of the passage in Hebrews in which the lives of the faithful are summed up in these words,

”**13** All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. **14** People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. **15** If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

When our circumstances get better as they sometimes do, it is meant to foreshadow for us the coming of this heavenly city. Easter is such a foreshadowing as well as springtime and harvest. We keep journeying and seeking in the confident faith that we are kept safe in God’s hands, and that all the wonderful things of in life point to eternity.

For those of us who are not farmers, we may not think of the harvest and ramble on and on about plants to our hearts delight, but we can think of wonderful things:

birth, the light in a child’s eye when they learn, romance, the beauty of nature, silly humor that brings laughter, music when we turn the sound back on again . . . each has a list.

The grace of God brings greater joy, so that we may join in the affirmation, “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

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