

**October 16, 2022 Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**Exodus 14:10-14, Psalm 118:1-9, 14-17, 25**

**"This is the Day the Lord has Made!"**

**Douglas T. King**

Your eyes are closed and your entire body is enveloped in the warmth of the sun. You listen to the sound of the waves crashing on the shore. You stretch out like a cat and open your eyes, to gaze down the length of a white, sandy beach. And then, beep...beep...beep.

What is that beeping? What is that beeping? You slowly swim up from the depths of sleep to recognize your alarm announcing to you the arrival of a new day. The sunny beach was just a dream. You are in your dark bedroom and you look out the window upon a gray, and chilly January morning. Turning off the alarm you quickly scroll through your long list of latest emails. As you click each one open you find yourself muttering through clenched teeth, "What fresh hell is this?" The sun has not even come all the way up and you are already feeling burdened by the day. And this day feels like an extension of yesterday in a long marathon of days that weigh heavily upon you. You sigh and wonder, "Do I have the strength to face this day?"

Am I the only one who has experienced a morning or two or more like this? I am seeing a few knowing glances out there, so I am assuming not.

Well the psalmist this morning paints an entirely different portrait of the day. We get no complaint of "What fresh hell?" in response to the newly born day. The first words on the lips of the psalmist are those of praise. "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever." But lest we think the psalmist is offering praise while he is on that sun-drenched beach in our dreams, the rest of the psalm tells of distress, being surrounded by enemies, and facing hardships.

In response to the challenges of the day we do not get a proclamation of relying solely on our own agency to navigate all that is to come. Rather we hear of taking refuge in the Lord. "The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation." It is not the psalmist's strength that will get her through the day, it is God's strength

And finally, we hear of how the psalmist frames the entire day. It is not a burden to be born. Rather it is a gift to be received. "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

In our scripture text from Exodus this morning we heard a frantic portion of the story of the parting of the Red Sea. As Pharaoh and his army draw near the Israelites are petrified with fear. Moses seek to calm their fears by announcing to them, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today.."

In the Jewish tradition, the parting of the Red Sea, the deliverance of the Jews to freedom is recounted each day as a part of morning prayer. Every day begins with a reminder that they have been delivered from slavery to freedom by their God. Every day that deliverance is brought before them as a vibrant and current reality that is recreated again and again. "See the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today."

In our theological and liturgical tradition we speak of God as the one who creates, redeems, and sustains us. We often hear much of that in the past tense. We think about how God created the world all those millennia ago and Jesus redeemed us in Jerusalem way back when. It is only the sustaining work of the Holy Spirit that feels like it is happening currently. But it has been said that all of these actions happen afresh every day; that each and every moment God is actively creating all of existence. And if the divine would pause in that activity for even a single moment all of creation and all of us would simply cease to exist.

I suppose one way to hear that is a little disconcerting. Our existence could be snuffed out with a divine hiccup in a moment's notice. But another way to hear it is that there is not a single moment in time when God is not focused upon each of us; creating existence for us, redeeming us, and sustaining us. Think about how miraculous and precious that makes every second. There is an urgency to the actions of God in our world and in our lives.

When we awake in the morning we tend to carry with us the assumption that the day before us is this inevitable thing through which we must maneuver. But in fact, each morning we awake to a day that God has chosen to create for us and give to us. Each morning we awake to Jesus Christ who offers us healing and reconciliation. Each morning we awake in the midst of the abiding care of the Holy Spirit. Claiming this reality allows us

to place these words as the very first upon our lips, "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it."

The daily care that God brings to all of existence, we are called to bring to our God and our worship of God. After the Israelites cross the Red Sea into freedom God instructs Moses to collect an offering to build an ark of the covenant. We often speak of this ark as the place where God dwells with the Israelites in the wilderness. But Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes that what God says is "Let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell in them...not in it." He goes on to say, "God does not live in buildings. He lives in builders." (Sacks, p. 95)

This is a helpful reminder that what makes the church the church is not the four walls which surround us. The church is the church by what we daily bring to it. Just like God creates each new day we must create the church each new day. All of the glorious history of Ladue Chapel does not make us a church. It is what we do today that makes us the church. The church must live and breathe to be what it is called to be by our God. It has been said that the church is always just one generation away from extinction. Every generation must build the church, must do its best to embody the faith and to pass it on to the next generation.

We gather on this Sunday and kick off this year's stewardship campaign with our theme "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." It would be easy to sit in this lovely sanctuary surrounded by this large facility and wonder what all the fuss is about stewardship. It appears we have all we need. But God does not live in buildings. God lives in builders. We are only the church when we are continuing to create, to share Christ's redemption, to offer sustenance to this congregation and beyond.

Just as there is an urgency to the divine's need to create each new day, so we too must have the same urgency as we seek to continue to be the church on each new day. But this need not be an urgency born of anxiety. This is an urgency born of gratitude. Just as the psalmist woke up and their first act was one of gratitude for the gift of the day from the divine, this is what we shall do. All that we bring to the church, our time, our talents, our treasure, all of it, is born out of thankfulness.

These past several years, in the midst of COVID, have been challenging for the church and we still face challenges. People are still reluctant to return. We have limited resources with which to provide ministry programs. We have uncertainty about

what the future may look like. The circumstances are vastly different but the psalmist would surely recognize what it means to face difficulties. And in response to those difficulties the psalmist responds with praise and with a trust in God's saving power.

This week we will all be receiving our stewardship materials in the mail. As we all prayerfully consider our pledge for this upcoming year, our promise of financial support, we too will do so with praise in our hearts and trust in God's saving power. Every dollar we can pledge, every dollar we can increase from last year will allow us to be the builders of the church in whom God wishes to dwell.

"This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Sacks, Jonathan, *Studies in Spirituality*, Maggid Books, New Milford, CT, 2021.