May 27, 2018

Psalm 29

Joy

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 29 UM Hymnal

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. **Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor.** The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, upon many waters. **The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.** The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; **the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.** The Lord makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. **The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.** The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; **the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.** The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forests bare; **and in his temple all cry, “Glory!”** The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as Ruler for ever. **May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!**

Today is Trinity Sunday when we celebrate that all three persons of the Trinity, God the creator, Jesus the redeemer, and the Holy Spirit the sustainer, exist together and work together for our salvation. God is three-in-one. The great mystery of our triune God. In our Bible Jesus never teaches about the Trinity. Instead the understanding of the Trinity emerged out of the questions raised as life intersected with Scripture. People had questions like if God is one, how do we experience God as three – Father, Son and Spirit? Why does one God need three names? How can God be three persons in one?

In Psalm 29 God is the creator - the one whose voice thunders over the waters and flashes forth flames of fire. God is the mighty and awe-inspiring creator. God is one yet distinct. Why is it so important to proclaim our God as the triune God, God in three persons, blessed Trinity? As Christians our language of God as Trinity is our particularly Christian way of speaking of our experience of God. It is our best attempt to give words to our faith. We are trying to give voice to what we believe how God is above us, within us, and around us. The Trinity shows us that the God of creation is the same God who cried out in a manger as Jesus of Nazareth and grew up as one of us. The Trinity shows us that God still remains with us as the Holy Spirit in freedom and in power, teaching us and leading us.

The Trinity is hard though because any words we offer about the nature of God will be inadequate. But, our proclamation of God as three-in-one is the best we have got to describe the portrait painted of God that we see in scripture and as we experience God in our own lives. I experience God as the creator with immense power who causes oaks to whirl. I experience God intimately as redeemer in the faces of each of you reminding me that we are not alone but that God is with us. I experience God as the wind walking with me, guiding me. Sometimes I experience God as the wild breeze, I don’t know where it came from or where it is going, but I know it just blew away all my plans for how I thought my life would go. The Trinity reminds me that God is God and I am not.

One of my favorite stories is of the Prodigal Son in Luke’s Gospel where the younger son asks for his inheritance and proceeds to spend it all. When he returns home, he realizes that his dad has been standing outside waiting for him for hours and hours each day. The father sees his younger son coming home, and the father runs to embrace him with all of his might. I remember when I went to college I had so much fun. A few years after I had graduated from college, I was talking with my mom about what it was like when I left home and she had an empty nest. I asked her how that experience had been for her. She said that she had cried for two weeks and I was shocked. I had no idea! She said that if I had ever called, I would have known, but I never called.

God is our strong mother, teaching us to walk and stand tall. God is our rock, our shelter, our Spirit within. God is the still, small voice. God is overwhelming power. God is friend and breath. We can experience God is so many different ways, but we have to be open to God’s presence. How do you experience God? I experience God in the smile of a stranger. I experience God in the beauty of a tree and its leaves.

I remember when I was a chaplain at Children’s Medical Center and I thought that one of the other chaplains was not very good. He was very shy and he was always in the cafeteria reading. At one of our weekly meetings the chaplain supervisor talked about how he had experienced the presence of God in this quiet chaplain. The supervisor had been walking by a hospital room, and saw the quiet chaplain with his hand on the back of a parent. In that gesture, he was letting that family know that God was with them. I guess he was an okay chaplain.

The amazing thing about God is God became flesh and lived among us in Jesus. The Message translation says “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14). I encounter Jesus when I am in service, whether it is helping my neighbor or helping someone who I don’t know. I experience Jesus when I am feeding the hungry, giving a drink to someone who is thirsty, welcoming a stranger, giving clothes to the naked, caring for the sick, or visiting those in prison (Matthew 25).

Ultimately, God is mystery, but you know what? I kind of like that. It frustrates me, but I like the idea that I can’t understand God. I like the idea that God is bigger than any kind of box that I try to put God in. God is mystery and love and welcome and embrace and joy. Do you remember that great Pixar movie *Inside Out*? There were five characters that personified emotions: anger, fear, disgust, sadness and joy. The movie is based on the consulting of neuroscientist Dacher Keltner from UC Berkley and he wanted to also have awe and shame but Pixar said five emotions was hard enough to handle.[[1]](#footnote-1) By that logic we should totally be able to handle God as three-in-one.

I am reading a book by a happiness researcher Shawn Achor called *Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises Our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being*. He was at Target with his three-year-old when *Inside Out* came out, and he found a stuffed animal of the character Joy. He took it off the shelf to show his child, and his son already had his arms wrapped around Sadness. He is a happiness researcher, so he tried to wrestle Joy out of his son’s arms, but his son was holding onto Sadness with all of his strength. In our lives we will experience anger, fear, disgust, sadness and joy. When we are sad it reminds us that we are lonely and need to reach out to others. Sadness reminds us when we are doing something that goes against our core values. Sadness tells us when our work in not in line with our priorities.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Discovering more joy does not save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily, too. Yet as we discover more joy, we can face suffering in a way that lifts us up rather than bring us down. We can have hardship without becoming hard. We can have heartbreak without being broken.[[3]](#footnote-3)

We want life to be perfect. We want everyone to agree with us, everything to go our way, work to always be fun, and God to be knowable.[[4]](#footnote-4) The happiness researcher defines happiness using the ancient Greeks’ definition of happiness, as the joy you feel striving toward your potential[[5]](#footnote-5). He says that the opposite of joy is not sadness; it is apathy, which is the loss of energy to continue to pursue one’s goals.[[6]](#footnote-6) True joy comes from our spirit embracing God’s Holy Spirit. Joy is what we hold tight to when we feel like life is falling down all around us but we believe that there is inherent good in the world. Joy is the happiness that does not depend on what happens. All joy takes place at the same time as all tragedy. If you’ve ever had fun, you’ve done it while people suffer. Joy is the grateful response to the opportunity that life offers us at this moment.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Joy is like spiritual white blood cells. Resistance. Immunity. Defense. Health. Wholeness. Integrity. Homeostasis. The more we heal our own pain, the more we can turn to the pain of others. The way we heal our own pain is actually by turning to the pain of others. It’s a virtuous cycle. The more we turn toward others, the more joy we experience, and the more joy we experience, the more we can bring joy to others. The goal is to be a reservoir of joy, an oasis of peace, a pool of serenity that can ripple out to all those around us.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Psalm 29 is an invitation for us to join the heavenly host and the Temple crowd in crying, “Glory!” For the amazing creation of our world, I cry out, “Glory!” For Jesus’s birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, I cry out, “Glory!” For the breath of God that gives me love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, I cry out, “Glory!” Psalm 29 ends with the word peace. “May the Lord bless his people with peace!”

The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. Shalom is the complete restoration of all things so that paradise is regained.  I have been reading a book called *The Book of Joy* by Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama and they wonder if joy could be the ultimate source of world peace.[[9]](#footnote-9) All is right, all is harmonious, all is balanced, all is healed, everything is perfect.  To create shalom, to create peace, we have to create joy, and then share it with our family, our friends, our neighbors, our church family, our workplace, our school, our nation, our world. That is the goal of the Triune God in the work of redemption.  God has already accomplished the first and decisive steps in that plan to restore peace.  We have celebrated that at Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost. We look back on those celebrations and we cry out, “Glory!”

When the weight of the world is crashing on us and bad things are happening everywhere we look, we want peace and we want joy. We just cannot find it. The Triune God is our path to peace and joy. When we turn to God in prayer and hand our troubles over, the Holy Ghost is with us and shows us the way forward. As we look ahead to the completion of the Triune God’s plan, we can be sure that there will finally be complete peace. “Glory!” and Amen.

1. Achor, Shawn. *Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being.* P. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Achor, Shawn. *Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being.* P. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World.* P. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Achor, Shawn. *Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being.* P. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://goodthinkinc.com/live-happy-the-new-definition-of-happiness/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Achor, Shawn. *Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being.* P. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World.* P. 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World.* P. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World.* P. 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)