

Sermon: June 7, 2015     Waterford Mennonite Church

## Moving with the Psalms: The Prayers of Orientation

This has been the year of the Bible here at WMC:

The focus has been on God's story: the story of salvation, *Heilsgeschichte*

The story begins with creation and continues on to the book of Revelation

But the story goes on—we are part of the story

But the Bible includes much more than *Heilsgeschichte*

This summer we will explore some of the "other books"

--These are the books of poetry and wisdom in the Old Testament

--We will begin with three Sundays looking at the Psalms

### **Psalms: The prayerbook for the people of Yahweh**

--Psalms: Bernhard Anderson has called the psalms, "God's word **for us**"

--in the Psalms, God shows us how to pray

--the other Scriptures (Old and New Testament) are "God's word **to us**."

**--the Psalms teach us to pray**

--Annie Lamott has written a wonderful book on prayer:

*Help, Thanks, Wow: Three Essential Prayers.*

--These are the common words that identify how we pray

But there are other words that also need to become part of our prayer life

We need to go beyond "Help," beyond "Thanks," beyond "Wow!"

### **The Psalm teach us, move us, to learn new language of prayer**

**Shh!** ("Be Still and know that I am God. Wait patiently for the Lord")

**Ouch!** ("How long, O Lord? Why have you forsaken me? I am in water up to my neck!")

**Yes!** (The Lord is my rock and my salvation. The Lord is my shepherd.)

### **The Psalms teach us how to move from orientation through disorientation to reorientation**

### **Claiming our Orientation**

Orientation mean that we know "where we are located in the world"

--Oriented within *Heilsgeschichte*

--Oriented toward being satisfied with what God has provided

--Oriented toward trusting that God will continue to act

--Oriented with the past still being present with us

--Oriented that God's covenants of divine commitment precede our response

### **Muttering about God, with God, to God (Psalm 1)**

Psalm 1 says that our delight is to be "in the teaching (Law, *Torah*) of the Lord" and that we will

"Mutter on it (meditate on it) day and night

We know that we can mutter in negative ways; but what are positive ways of "muttering"

"God is so good"

"God gives us food, freedom and place"

"God teaches us how to live well"

"Today how will I 'learn' from God's teaching?"

"What do I hear God saying today?"

"What 'new thing' is God doing?"

"Where is creation still happening?"

## **Orientation helps us when Disorientation happens**

## **Disorientation, faced honestly, prepares us for Reorientation**

When disoriented, we often have no words—only tears and silence

When disoriented, we need words to talk about our suffering:

- our physical and emotional suffering
- our loneliness and isolation
- the troubles that we do not deserve
- the persons who plague our lives
- the times when God is very distant
- the arrogance of those who deny God's presence

In disorientation, we need to know that someone else "knows how we feel."

In disorientation, we need to have words given to us so we can talk

**The Psalms teach us to pray—**

**our Orientation,  
our Disorientation, (*Our needs*)  
and our Reorientation**

**Learn the psalms:**

- learn their form:** the way that they move through disorientation
- learn the perspective:** the way that they talk (and think) about God
- learn to practice the richness of these prayers**
- **learning comes with 1) study and 2) memorizing** (writing them on our heart)

**Prayers of orientation (samples)**

Psalm 136: a recitation of God's graceful actions

- the refrain is that "God's devotion (steadfast love) is without limits"
- the psalm (a litany) names what God has done that we have not earned
- this is really a crescendo of affirmations about God's committed love

Psalm 23: a picture of a trustworthy God

- God is a shepherd who provides and protects
- God is a host who welcomes and feeds

Psalm 11: song of confidence

- God gives me protection when assaulted
- God is the ultimate authority (king with a throne) who notices and responds

**As we celebrate communion today we celebrate these same things:**

**We remember (participate again) in the actions that God does**

**These actions are the way our bodies and hearts review our orientation**

**Communion-as-prayer is our way of becoming present to God's gracious actions**

**Communion/eucharist is our way of "having the mind of Christ among us."**

--Ron Guengercih