

If you have a Bible with you, paper or electronic, let me encourage you to turn with me to Psalm 103; if you are using the Blue Bible you can find our text on page 939.

I've entitled our summer series *Finding Your Voice in the Psalms* because the Psalms are intended to be a two way communication. Yes, like the rest of Scripture, the Psalms are God's word to us; they are divinely inspired, and they reveal God to us. But, the Psalms are unique in that they were not written primarily for us, but for God.

The Psalms become our teacher; they teach us about prayer. They teach us how to pray, what we can pray, and who we are praying to. This morning I'm going to be teaching on Psalm 103, but first, I want to create space for each of you to meditate on this text of scripture. What I'd like to do is to lead all of us in an ancient Christian practice of reading known as *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio Divina is Latin phrase that means "sacred reading". Now, all reading of the Scripture is "sacred" in the sense that we are coming into contact with the holy; we read so that we can encounter God through His word. But the practice of *lectio divina* is a way of reading that invites us to slow down, engage our mind and heart, and listen for the word, phrase, or image that God wants to impress upon us.

For those of us type-A's, just in case you're wondering, there's no such thing as *speed-lectio*. The goal of sacred reading is not to get through as much scripture as possible, in the shortest amount of time--the goal is to meditate on the Scripture, to pay attention to what God is highlighting, and to invite the Holy Spirit to apply the word to our own life.

So I'm going to read through two sections from Psalm 103, vs. 1-5, and 8-12, and I'd like you to listen as I read. After I've finished reading, I'm going to ask if there was a specific word, phrase, or image that stood out for you.

1. A Reading of the Text: *Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.* (vs. 1-5)

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (vs. 8-12)

Q: So friends, *which word, phrase, or image stood out for you?* I'm now going to give us some time in silence, meditate on what stood out and why. **Silence.**

2. A Second Reading of the Text: now I'm going to read the text again. *Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.* (vs. 1-5)

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Q: *What has God been revealing to you as you meditate on this word/phrase/image? What do you feel?*

If we were a smaller group of people, we'd take time to share with one another what God has been revealing.

3. And now, take a few moments in silence to thank the Lord for the gift He has given.

Psalm 19:10 says that God's word is "*sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.*" Psalm 34:8 invites us to "*Taste and see that the LORD is good.*"

God's Word is real food...it refreshes the soul, makes wise the simple, it gives joy to the heart and light to the eyes, it cleanses, it purifies, it guides us in the way that is right.

Lectio Divina, is something you can engage in on your own, with a friend or spouse, with your small group; let me commend this practice to you.

1. A Personal Call To Worship: this morning, as we turn our minds and our hearts toward Psalm 103, I would like to begin where David

did. He begins this psalm with a personal call call to worship, he concludes this psalm by calling the entire cosmos to worship, and in between he builds a case for the worthiness of God. If you combine vs. 1-2 with vs. 20-22, you encounter six separate invitations to worship.

Illus: As a father, I frequently have to repeat myself when I'm talking to my children. When I'm at my best, I do so gently and patiently; when I'm not at my best (which is frequently), I might say something like "how many times do I have to tell you...*Luke, don't kick your sister,*" or, "*Anna, don't scream so loud, it makes daddy's eardrums bleed.*"

I'd like to think that when I am speaking, my children would be more attentive than they are; sometimes I need to repeat myself. When it comes to God speaking, I'd like to think that we would be more attentive than we really are; frequently we need God to repeat Himself. Whenever something is repeated in the Scriptures, like the example before us, we need to sit up and take notice--something weighty is being communicated.

We were made with the capacity for worship, but more than that, worship is the reason we were made. We were made for a life that revolves around God--like the earth revolves around the Sun--we were made to live with, and for, God.

God didn't create us because He was bored, or lonely. He didn't create us because He lacked resources, or had a lot to do and needed some minions to do the heavy lifting; God was utterly capable of any and every action. So what was it within the heart of God that prompted Him to create?

God created out of His abundance and generosity. God's beauty, His wisdom, His holiness, His love, His glory, are things to be enjoyed. God created humanity so that humanity might know Him and enjoy Him. The Westminster Confession states that "the chief [purpose] of [humanity] is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever;" this statement sums up the Scriptures' teaching on the meaning (telos) of life.¹ As humans, we find our meaning and purpose in aligning our lives to His.

Depending on your translation of the Bible, you might find one of three words in verse 1; David summon himself to bless, praise, or worship the LORD. The Hebrew word in question is *barak*; it means to adore God on bended knees. Psalm 95:6 says, "*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before [bless] the Lord our Maker*".

But David does more than sound the call to worship, he's getting himself ready: "*Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.*" Here is my own translation of David's self-talk: "*C'mon David, now is the time to praise the LORD, with all of your passion, emotion, and desire, kneel down before Him, for He alone is Holy, Perfect, and Pure.*"

In this psalm, David makes a profound statement about what God is worth--about what He deserves. God deserves all we have to give Him, and much more besides. He deserves worship, honour, respect, obedience, and love--God is worthy of pursuit.

¹ **worship:** Ps. 86:9; Isa. 60:21; Rom. 11:36; I Cor. 6:20; 10:31; Rev. 4:11; **enjoyment:** Ps. 16:5-11; 144:15; Isa. 12:2; Phil. 4:4; Rev. 21:3-4. Scriptures taken from Westminster Confession.

But like David, each of us must make up our own mind about the worthiness of God. We can ask questions like: "*what does He require?*" and "*what can I get away with?*", or we can ask: "*what is God worth?*", "*what does He deserve?*" and "*how much can I give?*"

David calls himself to praise, and we are meant to do the same--to rouse ourselves to praise God with our mind, our passions, with our desires, our will, our priorities, with our pursuits, with our loves, with our thoughts, words, deeds, time, and money.

After a brief call to worship, David begins his worship in earnest; he begins to rehearse the worthiness of the LORD. This is worship 101...it's fine to say that the LORD is worthy, but worship is meant to be specific...we're meant to go the extra mile and tell the LORD why He is worthy.

Illus: a long time ago, I learned that specificity is one of my wife's love languages. Every day, multiple times a day, I tell my wife that I love her. But, her eyes light up whenever I get specific. "*Naomi I love you because...*". I think God loves it even more when we get specific in our worship.

And starting in verse 2, David begins to get specific: *Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things...*

David's blesses the LORD in response to the blessings the LORD has already showered down upon him; friends it is impossible to out-bless God. David blesses the LORD because he knows that he's not getting what he deserves...he is getting much, much, more.

David lays out five ways in which the LORD is active to bless His people: He forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, and satisfies. Let's start where David does, with forgiveness.

a. The LORD forgives: In this Psalm, David uses three separate Hebrew words to describe our wrongdoing before God: *iniquity* (vs. 3, 10), *sin* (vs. 10), and *transgression* (vs. 12).

What's easy to miss when we talk about sin is the fact that sin is primarily a relational act. Our iniquity *bends* God's intentions, it *twists* relationships, it *distorts* life. The Bible describes transgression as active rebellion/revolt against God and others.

When we sin, we're doing more than breaking a rule, we're breaking trust, we're breaking relationship with a Person/person. Sin is our attempt to live independently of God, to create a life for ourselves on our own terms, quite apart from His way.

Because we've been made in the image of God, we are inherently relational, we have relationship in four directions: with God, self, others, and the world. The theologian, Scot McKnight writes, "Sin is...*hyperrelational*, or 'multi'-relational. It is active corruption in all directions".² He continues, "Sin begins in rebellion against God and...it spreads into the other relations."³

But David declares the wonderful truth that the LORD is a God of forgiveness. Verses 10-12 says, "*he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*"

Have you ever measured the expanse that separates the heavens and the earth? Have you ever measured the distance between east and west? They are beyond measure. The love of God is incalculable--the distance is too great. And God has dealt with the penalty for our sin...it has been taken care of by Jesus.

When we miss God's mark, or step off His path, He does not write us off our twistedness as fatal--His steadfast, forgiving love extends to us through Jesus.

² McKnight, 22.

³ McKnight, 23.

The LORD is worthy of praise because He is a forgiving God. David continues...

b. The LORD heals: I've just finished saying that sin has made a real mess of things; it has twisted the goodness God created. Sickness is a consequence of living in a sin-contaminated-world. Until Jesus rids the world of sin, sickness will remain, but, until that time comes, we are invited to ask the LORD for healing.⁴

David makes a bold declaration here, that God heals all of our diseases, and I believe that he is speaking the truth. God will heal every body, every mind, every heart, every relationship; the entire cosmos will be healed and restored...the only question is the matter of timing.

I've prayed for healing many times, over many people, many relationships, and many circumstances; I have seen God's powerful hand of healing. God is not far off and removed: "*As a [good] father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.*" (Ps. 103:13)"

And yet, not all of the people I've prayed for have received healing, not every relationship has reconciled, and not every circumstance has miraculously changed. But it hasn't stopped me from praying, and neither should it stop you. A long time ago I made a decision that I would do my part, that is, to pray, and I would trust God to do His part, that is, to answer, in His way and time.

⁴ There is a connection between sin and sickness, but not a direct line connection (i.e. "*You sinned personally, therefore, God has sent disease your way.*"). The Book of Job, and Jesus' encounter with a man born blind (John 9:1-3) should give us pause before declaring that personal illness stems directly from personal sin.

We can choose to take offense at God, and at times I have...I've been offended at God for what He isn't doing right now. But I've come to understand and accept that if God doesn't heal now, He will then. In walking with God over the course of my life, I have found Him to be faithful, trustworthy, loyal...and this has made all the difference when my timeline hasn't matched up with His.

I share the Christian conviction that every time we pray, something happens. We may receive what we ask for, or we may not, but God is never idle when we pray. God is living and active, He is present and powerful. And so until Jesus returns, I'm going to keep praying, keep seeking, keep asking, and leaving the answers to God.

We have a number of people at our church that we are asking God to heal (Janine Barnes, Mary Nielsen, Noni Hein, Cindy Ryon, Helen Tiers, Christine Harada, Ralph Shareski)...and there's more...I want to take a moment to pause now and lead us in prayer. Maybe you are seeking God for healing these days, it may be physical, emotional, relational, mental, or spiritual, it may be some one else's healing, as I pray, lift your specific concern with me to the LORD who heals.

Pray.

David's psalm presses on...The LORD is worthy because He redeems our life from the pit.

c. The LORD redeems from the pit: The "pit" is a reference to the grave, and this saving action of God ties back to forgiveness and

healing. The death rate is still 100%, but when we are about to die, God will rescue us--either through miraculous, divine healing, or through forgiveness and resurrection.

As followers of Jesus, death is not the end of life. Standing by the tomb of His friend Lazarus, Jesus said something I have staked my life upon: "*You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all*".⁵

Vs. 15-18 of Psalm 103 reminds us that our lives are transient--like the grass and the flowers, we are here today and gone tomorrow. But while our lives are temporary, God's love is not, it's everlasting, it doesn't fade, rust, or spoil...His loyal love carries us through death and into the life that will never end. God is worthy of worship.

But David isn't finished, the Lord is worthy because He crowns us with love and compassion.

d. The LORD crowns us with love and compassion: don't miss the royal language David uses here...he was a man who wore a crown for many years. If you have given your life to Christ, then you are a son or a daughter of the Great King. And the splendour that now rests upon your life, is the weight of God's love and compassion. Is there anything better than to be loved by God? Is there anything that has more lasting value or worth?

⁵ John 11:25-26, The Message.

⁶ שָׂבַע (s'ābēa')

David concludes his symphony of praise by blessing the Lord who satisfies our desires with good things.

e. The LORD satisfies our desires: the Hebrew word for satisfy⁶, conveys the idea of plenty, fullness, something that overflows, running over.

Living with and for God leads to an abundance in spirit, in purpose, in significance. You can hold on to your life so tightly that you end up choking the life out of your life, but when you abandon your life to Jesus, you find a life that guarantees satisfaction...a good measure now, and fullness forever.

Conclusion: Now there is so much more we could have looked at in this Psalm, and I'd encourage you to continue chewing through it in the coming week, but I'd like to conclude where David did, with another call to worship.

On Friday night, Naomi and I tuned in with billions of spectators to watch the opening ceremony of the London Olympics. There are always going to be critics out there, but I quite enjoyed myself; there were many great moments.

Did you have a favourite moment? Was it James Bond-meets-Queen Elizabeth, or the visual re-creation of London's history, or David Beckham captaining a boat up the River Thames, or the lighting of

the Olympic Caldron? For me, the best moment was a surprise that came about 5 minutes in.

It began with a children's choir singing in the London stadium, then we were taken by camera to a rocky crag in Ireland where they sang a stirring rendition of *Danny Boy*. The camera then took us to Scotland, where the children sang of heather and glen, and finally the camera came to rest on a beach in Wales. Does anyone remember what they sang?

*Guide me, O Thou Great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty, hold me with Thy powerful hand;
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more; feed
me till I want no more.*

I don't suspect that many of the billions watching would claim that moment as their favourite...but it was mine. I'm told the estimated cost of opening ceremony was \$42.3 million dollars; someone decided that what it was worth to welcome the world and showcase the uniqueness of Great Britain.

I'm convinced, God stands unparalleled in uniqueness and worth. David concludes his psalm with a cosmic call to worship: *The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.*

And so my challenge to you this morning is simply this: Praise the LORD for He is worthy. We cannot think too much of Him, or give

Him too much, or praise Him too highly. He is worthy of all that we have and more. May His name be praised, both now and forever.