

Sermon 25a 2017: Psalm 1 - Happiness in the Love and Presence of God

Introduction: The World Is Not Enough!

Bill Broyles rose to senior editor of *Newseek* magazine;

It was a heady world of power and intrigue and creativity;
He spent every day on the phone and in the company
Of the most influential people in the world.

He helped to determine the public perception of events that were shaping history;

He made hundreds of thousands of dollars;
He was the idol of everybody who knew him because he had it all;
And Broyles found his world and his life emptier and emptier by the day.

He began to wake up in the morning with the taste of despair in his mouth;

And with the nagging thought that there must be something more than this;
There had to be something more.

So one morning he walked into the office and resigned; walked away from everything;

He cleaned out his desk and retired from that life at the age of forty;
He began climbing mountains;
Searching for something that was missing down below;
He climbed higher and higher and in the wind and the cold;
He began to sense a presence that was missing before.

Marcia Mays was a doctor in Florida and her husband a civil engineer;

When the husband's company moved him to a big job in North Carolina;
She decided to pursue a nagging calling she'd felt all her life;
Instead of opening up a new practice or joining a practice there;
She enrolled in Divinity School to learn more about her faith.

When she finished her degree, she became a deacon in her church

And was instrumental in opening a free clinic in an impoverished area outside of town

Volunteering her time as a doctor and as a person of faith;
Offering a double cure, if you will.

A few years ago a member of our congregation came to me
To talk about closing his business; He said he'd had enough;
He said he wasn't happy, that the business made him unhappy
And he wanted to change his life.

We talked over several months about the source of his unhappiness
And it turns out it wasn't the business, it was his focus in life;
He was all material, all money, all toys - no spirit;
He's still in that business today, but his goals, his purposes in life
Are very different and that's made all the difference.

These three people aren't unusual today, aren't different from many of us;
They reflect the great spiritual unrest in our world;
The deep and growing sense that there must be something more;
Something or someone more in our lives
Than the world or the culture have to offer;
The world, it turns out, is never enough.

And not only is the world never enough, but also the world around us keeps shifting;
A prolonged war against terrorism around the globe;
Makes us wonder whether there'll ever be peace.

The economy is looking pretty good right now for some of us, but not for all of us
We are in a period a great social disequilibrium at home and abroad
And we wonder what we've been doing all these years to save and invest;
And what will become of us going forward;
What will happen to us?

The values we've held dear have seemingly disappeared and anything goes;
And as the earth shifts, we hunger and thirst for meaning, for understanding,
For a way to be, for a way to live, and for a way to make a difference.

And instinctively, as Augustine once said, our hearts are restless until they find rest in God,
Instinctively, we turn to spiritual matters, to journeys of the heart
To discover what's missing in our lives;
We know there is something or someone deeper
And we know it has to do with discovering the presence of the Spirit.

Happiness in God

Thankfully, God offers us a vision and balance for our lives;
A playbook, a set of rules that give hope and direction for our lives;
From the time we're very young to our most mature years.

Listen again to the words from the Psalm this morning,
Happy are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord
And on His law they meditate day and night;
The psalmist, probably King David, is speaking to us this morning.

Psalm One and this verse are the topic sentence for all 150 psalms
150 Psalms that speak to the life of seeking after God;
Of falling away, of returning, of facing great challenges,
And all leading us back to the life connected to God..

Now some of us may have a negative sense of the law because in Jesus' day
The religious leaders who were working so hard to follow the law
Missed the point of how it connects us to God and rejected Jesus;
And St. Paul says, the law kills, but the spirit gives life;
But those, I think are only a part of the truth.

In general, the law was considered beautiful and gracious,
The Hebrew word Torah for the first five books of the Bible means the way of life;

The laws or ways of living are a gift from God for the fulfillment of the human spirit;
Jesus Himself loved the law and once said that not a punctuation point
Would be removed from it until the day God's kingdom came in its completeness.

Jesus even uses the law, quotes from the law this morning to define the path
That leads to a real life with God and a real life with one another;
He quotes from the Torah, from the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus
The greatest commandments or laws are these:
To Love God with all your heart and soul and mind
And to love your neighbor as you're loving yourself.

These are the boundaries, these are the balancers for real life and give purpose
And while some of the 613 laws don't apply today, like how to sacrifice a lamb;
The law offers a life of meaning and goodness through God's law.

The law gives meaning in our lives, gives stability in the face of change;
And as the Psalm says, the person who meditates on the law day and night
Will be like a tree planted by a stream of living water;
A vision of abundance and growth and fruitfulness
Even in dry and difficult and unstable times.

The truth has been in front of us all along; The path is well marked;
The way to spiritual depth and meaning in life comes through meditating
Through focusing on what God has already given us.

It comes when we become inward people in a world that is mostly outward;
It comes when we make an effort to spend time with God when others aren't;
It comes through praying and seeking and pursuing a life in the Spirit;
Seeking the Spirit in a world that denies the Spirit exists
In a world that insists that
Everything is material and immediate and now.

And think what you and I are missing when we don't live our lives in this way;
We're missing the opportunity of relaxing and unburdening ourselves
Of finding peace and purpose in the Spirit that is at the heart of everything
And at the heart of this God who loves us so.

Making Other Plans

We've been talking about stewardship this month, financial stewardship, yes,
But also the use of our time and talent for God and for the good of others;
Being good stewards of all that God has given us
Is part of God's plan for us because it gives us purpose
And being good stewards will give us peace.

We know that life is difficult today, so demanding and even crushing at times;
Our schedules alone are enough to shorten our life spans;
I saw a man in the airport this summer running frantically down the concourse
Screaming. "My Iphone! My Iphone! I've lost my Iphone!
If I don't find it my life is ruined."

There was a short blurb in the magazine The Week that someone called 911
For emergency help because they couldn't get on Facebook.

Traffic alone is an enormous area of stress;
Imagine if you could have shown our great grandparents a DVD
Of what you and I see every day: People putting on make-up as they drive;
People not only talking on their cell phones, but also texting one another;
People gulping down coffee and fast food,
Raising their cholesterol and anxiety at the same time;
I think our great grandparents would be horrified by the lack of good boundaries, we are.

And after a stress filled day of hard work, mixed business news, difficulties at school;
Many of us come in at night and plop ourselves in front of the TV,
Too tired to do anything else.

But TV doesn't help and only raises our sense of unrest and confusion
Until we stumble into bed to get ready to do it again tomorrow.

You and I need the presence of God in our lives if we ever expect to find true happiness;
We need to take time with God to let ourselves go;
Where we can be held and comforted, rocked and assured, calmed and loved;
Where we can admit that we messed up again
And hear God whisper to our souls that that's all right,
Just relax, take a breath, and let's enjoy this time together.

It's in the presence of God that we'll find ourselves again;
It's in the presence of God that we'll know deeply who we are
And what this life is really all about.

We may not be led to change all of what we're doing in our lives
But in God's presence we'll discover the integrity and the peace
That seems to be missing in the world around us;
In God's presence we can touch bottom and stop treading water;
We'll connect with the center and we'll know love.

And so I invite you to a new life today and every day:
I invite you to enter into a life of happiness, a life of blessing, a life with God;
Open your Bibles; meditate, focus, pray on God's law day and night;
And then walk in the path of life that God has set before us;
Not as a burden, but out of delight;
And you, too, will be like a tree planted by streams of living waters
Bearing fruit and knowing peace even in dry and in difficult times.

Amen.