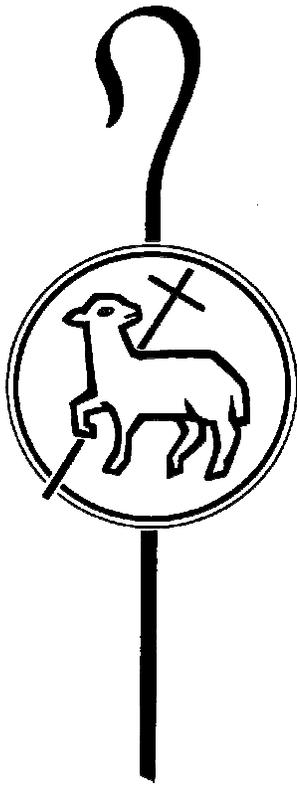


feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

November 20, 2012

Dearest family,



On Sunday we began (at last) a new “pseries”: PSERMONS ON THE PSALMS. This book of the Bible is a challenge to introduce, apart from the fact that it is the largest book in scripture. It has a breadth of range, whether authorship or historical chronology, whether themes or subjects, whether moods or tones, whether literary features or theological meaning. My goal on Sunday was to give you a feel for this variety and diversity and hopefully some helpful tools for the study of their meaning. Early on I quoted Walter Brueggemann, a prolific scholar of the psalms: *“The Psalms are a centerpiece of Christian liturgy, piety and spirituality. They have been so from the beginning of the Christian movement for good reason. They have been found poignant in expression, able to empower believing imagination in many ways. This is evident in the rich usage made of the psalms in the New Testament, most especially in the passion of Jesus. But the use of the psalms by Christians is not without awkwardness, for the psalms are relentlessly Jewish in their mode of expression and their faith claims. And with our best intent for generosity and good faith, the different nuances of Jewish and Christian faith are not to be overlooked or easily accommodated.”* Brueggemann’s statement is a useful springboard for some necessarily obvious introductory comments. Yes, the Psalms are indeed *“relentlessly Jewish.”* The psalms constitute Israel’s Prayer Book, known as the “sefer tehilim”, the Book of Praise. To Christians, they are the indispensable Psalms, from the Greek “psalmos” meaning a song sung to a stringed instrument, the translation used in the Greek version of the OT, read by the early church community.

I’m going to give you some of the lists that I put up on powerpoint so you have a record of them in case you were unable to take notes. Also, attached to this email is an article that will elaborate on some of the important principles of interpretation that we need when studying the psalms.

I’m going to give you some of the lists that I put up on powerpoint so you have a record of them in case you were unable to take notes. Also, attached to this email is an article that will elaborate on some of the important principles of interpretation that we need when studying the psalms.

Structure:

- BOOK 1: 1-41
- BOOK 2: 42-72
- BOOK 3: 73-89
- BOOK 4: 90-106
- BOOK 5: 107-150

Some general movements:

- Spiritual movement
- Historical movement
- Emotional movement

Genres:

Hymns; Laments; Imprecations; Penitence; Thanksgivings; Confidence; Remembrance; Wisdom and Instruction; Celebration.

Essentially, of course, **the Psalms are all about who God is.**

- Because He is CREATOR and we are creatures we just cannot live anyway we like.
- Because He is HOLY and we are sinners, we cannot just come to Him anyway we like.
- They are all about the covenantal love relationship between God and His people.

Some of the main themes/subjects (Bonhoeffer's schemata)

Creation; The Law and Word; Holy History; The Messiah; The people of God; The life of faith; Suffering; Guilt; Enemies; The end of things

Principles of interpretation:

1. Read a psalm in its context
2. Identify the genre
3. Note the poetic structure and literary devices (they are poems!)
4. Examine and unpack images and metaphors
5. Read psalm in light of its title where relevant
6. Check out its theological meaning
7. Consider how it relates to Jesus Christ
8. Meditate on ways psalm speaks to you
9. Deal with difficult expressions and experiences
10. Apply! Learning, loving, living.

Unfortunately, I did not have time to finish the introduction so that was Intro Part 1. We covered more of the "Jewishness" aspects: the Psalms in relation to Israel; the Psalms in relation to other psalms; the Psalms in relation to key themes and subjects; the Psalms in relation to principles of interpretation.

In our next session, Intro Part 2, we will focus specifically on the Christian usage and relationship to the psalms, making comments on: the Psalms in relation to the New Testament; the Psalms in relation to Jesus; the Psalms in relation to the church; the psalms in relation to...US... to ME!

Then we will look briefly at the introduction to the collection that comes at the very beginning, Psalms 1 and 2, which set us up for what is to come. Don't forget your homework and be sure to read these two psalms before our next session. If you can spend a little time meditating on them that would be excellent.

It's not surprising, is it, that Athanasius would describe the Psalms as "*an epitome of the whole scriptures*" or that Luther would describe the collection as "*a little Bible and the summary of the OT.*" Another commentator has observed: "*It includes illustrations of every religious truth which it is necessary for us to know.*" I think you got the idea that there was going to be no shortage of possible content. I invite you to join me over the next few months and see where they lead us. I certainly know who they will lead us to, as they will source our learning, inspire our loving, equip our living, and tutor and nurture our leading through the holy direction of our wills that choose to obey the statutes of the Lord. And don't forget, we are all expecting to become psalm-makers, so get that journal! It would be wonderful to end this "pseries" with a public reading and singing of Christ Our Shepherd's new Psalm collection.

Pastorally yours,
Stuart

<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)