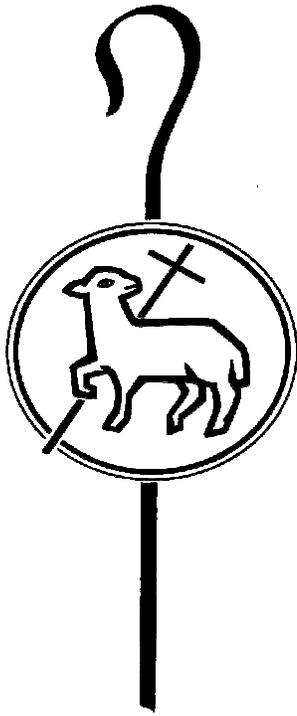


## feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

February 20, 2013

Dearest family,



First of all, on behalf of the McAlpines and Parkers, thank you for those incredibly overwhelming and generous communications of love and affection towards us on Sunday. We were completely surprised and as you noticed, somewhat awkward to boot! But I guess that is how one is meant to be when totally surprised! Lisa read 1 Timothy 5:17 as the scriptural premise for this “honoring” of those “whose work is preaching and teaching.” We are so privileged to serve you in this ministry of the Word, in the best way we are able. Of course, the commendation is shared, as someone has to listen to us, in some cases, for some time! We did indeed feel honored and loved. Thank you. And thank you too for the faithful discipleship that was represented by the presentation of the budget, as the Lord continues to meet our church’s needs and through us the needs of others. As well as the COSC budget, we also have the Care Company and TAG budgets to be thankful for, that represent the hearts and capacities of this congregation to give to the work of the Lord, both locally and internationally.

Well, the day you thought would never come did eventually arrive as I managed, just, to finish the introduction to the Psalms, which included not just a general overview but also a specific look at the two opening psalms that together form an internal introduction to the collection that follows. I’m sorry that this introduction seemed as long as a series itself, but I am praying there was much spiritual profit for taking the time to do this.

After treating Psalm 2 (insurrection; indignation; installation; invocation; injunction and invitation) I mentioned how important this psalm was in its NT use, especially by the apostles, who must have gleaned their interpretations from Jesus himself as he explained how the Psalms had to be fulfilled concerning himself. (Lk. 24:44) It is when we look at passages like Acts 4 that we can learn so much for ourselves from the same psalm that fortified them at a challenging time in their lives and ministry.

**There are two keys here to their triumph in trouble. First**, they were saturated in Scripture. They could quote and pray Psalm 2 because they knew Psalm 1 and were rooted meditators in the Word. They’d been on an intensive biblical meditation course with Jesus for 40 days! They were soaked in the Word’s truth, encouragement, instruction, guidance, power, and authority. It was hidden in their heart. It was the sap in their trunk as it were. It was the springboard for their appeal to God and their faith and their trust. They knew how to ask (Psalm 2) according to the Word (Psalm 1). **Secondly**, by doing that, they recalled and remembered the truth of psalm 2 and they asked its application for their own situation, a thousand years after it was written. It was still a living word of truth for their circumstances. They remembered that God remains the sovereign in crisis. He is bone dry above the flood. His laughter is heard above the shouts of the enemies. He is in control of the crisis that would threaten to unravel life. What had happened? The representatives of nations, the Jews, the Romans, and the Gentiles were seeking to silence the message about Jesus. Why were the apostles emboldened despite the turmoil? Why did they have hope that their call to the nations, their commission from Jesus, would not be silenced, not stopped, not snuffed out. What is the turning point in the possible slide to despair? Peter quotes Psalm 2. We know this passage as the Acts 4 prayer meeting. It should be properly called the Psalm 2 prayer meeting. No matter what, they were going to ask for the nations. With the nations raging against them, this is how they were able to rise above it all. By standing on Psalm 2, they were able to reconnect with the God who was enthroned above the flood of need and despair and trouble, and they received a fresh revelation of the greatness of God, despite the limitations of their situation, and of their resources. Listen to what they asked for! They asked that God would embolden their mission. They asked to be even more effective, and they asked God to stretch out his hand and heal – they asked God to do mighty things in the nations. The place where they asked was shaken. The Holy Spirit invaded the place. I

guess God approved. How changed were their expectations, on the basis of Psalm 2, about what God could accomplish through them, despite the external circumstances. The issue was not what was against them, or against the Lord. If God was for them, who could be against them?

This word is as true for us today. Amidst the realities of **CRISIS** we need a revelation of the anointed one, the **CHRIST**. Don't think crisis – think Christ. Don't think threat – think throne. Don't think axe – think ASK! This has always been the revelation to those who are besieged. Is it any surprise that Psalm 2 is an influence in the Apocalypse? This was the revelation that John had as a prisoner for the gospel on Patmos while the rest of the world was going to hell and the church was being pounded with persecution. Why was this so important for the churches being addressed to have a vision similar to that of Psalm 2? Because they were under terrible duress! They were being oppressed by their culture in general and belittled by their immediate community in particular. They were being ridiculed and persecuted. They were suffering. They were enduring all manner of hardships. It is so easy, when we are earth-bound, when we are pressure-driven, when we feel constricted and confined, battered and bruised, frustrated and stymied, when sacrifice does not seem to be paying dividends, when the promise never seems like its going to be fulfilled, when getting round the next corner only reveals another bend in the road – it's then that we need the scales knocked off our eyes in order to grasp afresh something of the incredible supernatural orientation of our lives, beyond the hum-drum of getting through another tough day. We need a vision of that Psalm 2 “holy hill.”

- We must see how we relate to the Father and to the Son before we can relate well to anything or anyone else.
- We must see how our lives and work relate to that vision of what is to come to “the ends of the earth” and beyond to the world to come, not just this one.

If our perspective is to be right, then the Son, our Christ, the anointed one of Psalm 2, the Son of Man of Revelation, this Christ must be seen and known in his true perspective. If the terrors of unfolding history are to be faced and endured and triumphed over, then Christ the Son must be known and believed in his awesome majesty and awesome power.

The similarities between the movement and theme of Psalm 2 and Revelation are more than coincidental. The narrator in the psalm could have been transfixed and traumatized by the sight of the raging nations but he sees the enthroned installed King. John could have seen just the lamp-stands that were the symbols that represented the churches: the challenges, the work, the responsibilities, the needs, the call, the duty, the ministry, the job, the people, the community, the discipleship, the battle, the suffering, the persecution. That's the stuff that he saw first and that we always see first. We can't see Christ for Christians. We can't see Christ for the church as in we can't see the Psalm 1 tree for all the trees in the forest. I'm so glad it didn't end there. I'm so relieved that in Psalm 2, after we read “the rulers gather against the Lord” the Lord goes on to tell the Son, “you will rule them with an iron scepter.” I am so glad in Revelation that when John could have only heard the terrifying sound of the waves that crashed on the rocks at his feet, imprisoning him there and denying any escape, instead he heard the voice of Christ “like the sound of rushing waters.” (1:15) He could have seen only the iron fist of Rome pounding on the church, but he saw the iron rod in the hand of the Son: “He will rule the nations with an iron scepter.” (Rev. 19:15) As I just said, John could have seen only the lamp-stands of the churches with all their problems and persecutions and with all the threats that were about to extinguish their flickering light but he saw the Christ who walked among the lamp-stands: “among the lamp-stands was someone like the son of man.” What hopelessness if all the psalmist had seen was the enraged earthly kings, and not the enthroned divine King; what hopelessness if John had only seen the lamp-stands and not the one who was on patrol and in control among the lamp-stands. “Son...” and “...Son of Man” sound like such understatements given the nature of the malevolence in their respective worlds. But when you look closer, the vision breaks in on the psalmist and on John – it is all about the anointed one, the messiah, the Christ; it is all about the glorified Jesus.

The Word of this Psalm 2, if we meditate in it, will strengthen our roots, and give us stability in turbulent times. Is it any wonder that it carries such meaning for the persecuted church? As the world rages about them, their trust is in the anointed one. They may be incarcerated but he is installed, and the end of their lives is not the end of their story. You should really get this psalm into your spirit because it is a “last days” psalm, as Revelation makes clear. The end times as described there are the same as in the psalm: the anger of nations (11:18); the political conspiracies against God's truth (19:19); the demonstrations of the messiah's rod of iron (2:27; 12:5;

19:15). Psalm 2 begins with a hurricane. But as you know, in the center of every hurricane there is a still and quiet center. Jesus, the Son is that center. The psalm is reminding us of what someone had described as “the quiet sovereignty of God”. It is calling us to the place of asking where we accept our anointing to be God’s agents in this raging world as his sons and daughters...asking for the nations and for the peoples...refusing to cede them into the hand of the enemy.

So taken together, we find these two psalms form an extraordinary overture indeed.

**PSALM 1**

The word  
The message  
Rooting  
Personal  
Meditating in the torah  
Present help  
Personal contentment

**Blessing**

**Judgment**

**PSALM 2**

The world  
The mission  
Ruling (reigning with him)  
Political  
Asking for the nations  
Future hope  
Public contention

**Blessing**

**Judgment**

Is your life described by these psalms before we go a step further into the Psalter? What is your engagement with God’s word when all is said and done? Are you relating to Psalm 1? And what is your engagement with God’s world? Are you relating to Psalm 2? One of the ways we represent that at COSC is through means like Care Company and The Antioch Group. How are you engaged in these? How noisy is your meditation? How noisy is your asking? How far from that stream is your present life? So what is the health of your tree? What is the present fruit of your life? Are there more leaves than fruit? Does what is seen outweigh what is rooted and hidden? What is your outreach to neighborhood and nations? What about your asking? If everyone’s asking was just like ours, would we be a house of prayer for all nations, or should the banner come down, or should we at least add a disclaimer?

Fundamental to our understanding of the world of the Psalms will be our personal maturity in the meditating on the word and in our asking for our world. They are all about word and worship. They are all about asking and answering. They are all about the presence of the Lord in the sanctuary, the private place of devotion, but they are all about the public world of the nation, and the nations. These psalms are not just the connectors with the rest of the psalms, they are the connectors between us and our God, and between us and his world. Everything hinges on this. It is the strategy, it is the substance, it is the method, it is the message for our private personal devotion, but also for our public political engagement. Can I continue this series, or should I just stop here until these two psalms indeed describe the realities of our loves and our lives?

Pastorally yours,  
Stuart

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