

Guest Reflections "Parents of SPC" July 14, 2024

Morgan Wisniewski

Based on Psalm 85: verses 8-13

8: Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
For he will speak peace to his people,
To his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

9: Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
That his glory may dwell in our land.

10. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

11. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
And righteousness will look down from the sky.

12. The Lord will give what is good,
And our land will yield its increase.

13. Righteousness will go before him
And will make a path for his steps.

Google says that Psalm 85 is a communal prayer for help and verses 8-13 express confidence that the help prayed for will indeed come.

*It continues to say: God's glory will again come to the land. In other words, God will again be present to bless the community and nurture it to fullness of life. And this gift is **for the faithful**, those whose lives are centered in relationship with God.*

God is love, and those who abide in love, abide in God. Lift up your hearts! We lift them up to the Lord.

I have chosen to raise my children here at SPC, with a cycle and habit of attending services, becoming a part of service, and over the years, generally being a part of the church. In the past I've sung songs, had my children baptized here, was baptized here myself, got married here, got divorced during covid, and now raising my one year old daughter to know these same pews, and long stretches of carpet, easy going stairs and friendly adoring faces.

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look

down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and will make a path for his steps.

A lot of people have used humor to describe the difficulty of parenting. Comedian Jim Gaffigan responds to what it is like to have his 4th child be born: "It's like if you were drowning, and someone hands you a baby." Well that is very similar to how it feels being handed your first baby, second baby or any baby. It feels a little bit like being blindfolded in a dark forest, and there are scattered legos on the forest floor for you to step on, as well as sleepless nights and panic stricken sicknesses for you to endure.

To watch your children grow, many will say, is like having your heart grow outside of your body. Indeed, raising my two boys and daughter is one of the most challenging and surrender-filled aspects of my adulthood.

This psalm speaks to a certain kind of rainbow after a storm, a hug upon entering a room, a vision of hope after a time of hopelessness. Parenting oftentimes feels hopeless or solitary, an image on social media stated "In lieu of the so-called village you were promised, it's ok to use screen time." Using screens to help you get through parenting. Using toys, food, bribery, parks, ice cream, bodies of water, walks, movies, basically using anything you can, to get through this time of your life and still the collective voice rings out to parents: "Enjoy it!" It's going to go by before you know it!

The point here is that much like the people of the bible. Parents are in their own state of wilderness. We are sifting through the years awaiting that blissful 10 hour stretch of sleep we haven't seen in over a year or two or ten. We're also in desperate need of a support system during this time. I could dare to say that everyone is in need of more of a support system, but, speaking for myself, I know that this is very important especially during the first few years of raising a new child. I have kind of grown up here at SPC over the last 14 years and the church has welcomed me over and over again, parented me, and watched me parent.

Again speaking for myself, parenting 3 small children as the only adult in the house- a form of single parenting- while also coparenting, and working 2 part time jobs, has brought me to a new humble view of life. In so many ways, I am anxiously awaiting that rainbow sign. Anxious to meet and greet and embrace God's promise. Once I do meet this peace, I will feel it in my nervous system. It will reflect in my actions. My voice will be more gentle. There will be signs of restoration. But for now I continue to paddle my way through each day, with avid faith, built up around me like a coat of armor. A Faith so sticky that it attracts blessings each and every day. A desire for peace so strong that I dive into recovery for myself and my beautiful family.

Faithfulness springs up from the ground and righteousness, or steadfast truth, comes down from the sky.

As parents we pause. And we try to locate this rainbow within the chaos of raising all of us. We try to rest in a self made peace, one that comes and goes throughout the day. We take a deep breath, smelling the wet freshly showered hair of our children as they sit in our laps (maybe for the last time) and we pray, in our own way, that we will meet the God within us sooner than later. Accepting them fully. We pray, in our own way, for less brutal cobblestone to be laid on our path. I say to my son, "I was a real jerk yesterday, I'm continuing to try to do better everyday". My son replies. Yeah you were. But I understand.

The passage says: Let me hear what God the Lord will speak for, he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet, righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

This is the bliss of a stranger saying hello, or a friendly face letting you know they are happy to see you, letting your children go away for a half hour to build their own understanding of faith.

This is why we come to SPC. And this is why we will keep coming back.

Amen.

Ellie Lloyd

Based on 2 Samuel chapter 6 verses 1-5 and 12-19

So, this morning's quest was to share my reflection or interpretation of a scripture passage for this week's lectionary – how it might relate to my life, and maybe more specifically my life as a parent attempting to raise children in the church. When I initially said yes, the assignment felt easy – what parent out there can't come up with a few minutes worth of things to say about their children? I mean – have you seen my kids?

But then I got the lectionary list and started to feel the sweat forming on my palms. Making a decision quickly has never been my strong suit.

2 Samuel chapter 6 verses 1-5 and 12-19 was first on the list.

In 2 Samuel chapter 6, David is King and he is bringing the Ark of the covenant to his city – my brain starts humming the Indiana Jones theme song and thinking ... I like Indiana Jones ... I did a little more reading into the Ark of the Covenant and there's some history much later on possibly linking the Ark to Ethiopia – which is a talk for another day – but that felt like a sign that this was my selection for today since I'd traveled to Ethiopia through this church many years ago. It also happened to be the first passage on the list and I might have gotten side tracked while working on reviewing each of the choices by the time I needed to send in my selection... (remember those cute kids I mentioned >< ...)

Boy, do I feel like I picked a doozy of a passage. If you noticed before, the lectionary today covers verses 1-5 and 12-19. The story feels vastly different read from start to finish versus just the selections for the lectionary – but perhaps all we're meant to focus on today is making a joyful noise – so that is the vantage point where I will draw my reflection.

In verses 1-5 -- King David, having just defeated the Philistines, gathered 30,000 men to bring the Ark of God to the city of David. There they were, a fancy new cart on display, carrying the Ark for all to see, celebrating with all their might.

Were they thinking – God will be pleased with this fancy new cart?!

That. Fancy. New. Cart.

I gotta get to the store --- my kids need those new brand name sneakers everyone is raving about. There's a jacket too – they already have 10, but this one they need. Oh, and I just have to have that new cup to keep my water cold. I LOVE that pink cup.

God had specific rules for how the Ark was to be transported – and they didn't include a fancy new cart. King David and his people failed to remember those rules, so caught up in their celebration, they forgot to treat the Presence of God with its due respect.

It's not the shoe brand

Not the fancy new jacket

Not the cup (even though it's pink)

But the foot that walks in the shoe. The body that is warmed by the jacket. The water that is inside the cup.

Our joyful noise, though loud, is missing the point. Much like David and the 30,000 marchers – we trumpet our Christianity / the Presence of God in our lives and dance and make music in our excitement for good things. But God didn't want that fancy new cart carrying the Ark. And we've already learned from David's past that a simple, young sheep farmer can defeat Goliath with a sling shot and God's Love.

How do we put our faith in action and not just in voice? So that our Christianity is tied to deeds instead of used as a title to garner power. How do we hold our politicians accountable for their self-proclaimed Christianity – DO IT, BE IT NOT JUST SAY IT.

As a Christian, I can say there are times I am embarrassed to be lumped in with the overall term "Christian" these days.

We HATE people who are different than us but we LOVE cups (or insert other inanimate object here) !?!?

My children are 3.5 and 9 months old – how do I even teach them about this stuff.

Well, the answer is right in front of me. I created a family with a partner who knows how to say LOVE and mean it. If you've not had an opportunity to meet my Harald yet, I hope you do so you see what I mean. He says I love you and means it with his whole soul – you feel it in your whole soul. My children feel in their whole souls. I didn't arrive to these thoughts on faith on my own – my grandparents and parents brought me into this community, here at SPC. I have grown up with a loving community, an extension of my own family, who not only say on Sundays but do in actions a phrase we say here often – “God is Love. And those who abide in Love abide in God.”

SPC has taught me to speak up against hate. To question and challenge. To seek out and give to the needy among us. To share my voice even when it's different. To explore and learn from the world. To make a joyful noise – to the seed because without that seed, there can be no forest.

One thing we all have in common these days is being busy – too busy. We have to make time in our lives to rejoice in the presence of God, for ourselves and for our children. David didn't bring the Ark alone, he had 30,000 people with him. Our community of faith has been important to me and my family – to have a community to help my children always see, respect, and rejoice in the seed. To desire to plant seeds of love and faith – and to know we're not perfect but to keep trying to find God's presence at the center of our lives.

In the second half of today's reading, verses 12-19, we again hear of David moving the Ark with great celebration. He has heard the Ark has brought blessings and so he is finally ready to move it into his city. This time, including no mention of a fancy cart. David is dancing for the Lord with all his might (even being described as nearly naked). There is music dancing and offerings. The Ark is placed in its own tent and then King David blesses all the people and gives everyone bread and cakes to take home.

All were blessed. All received the same bread and cakes. Not just those in the brand name sneakers or jackets and with fancy cups. Not with parameters around who you love or who you are.

David understands that even the lowly sheep farmer has the ability to be King with God's love in his heart. And he is not ashamed to dance nearly naked – not becoming of a king – because his heart is full of love for God. David is rejoicing -- The Presence of God (the Ark) has been returned to the center of their world.

David was not perfect – nor are we. We could all do with a little more Love.

I choose to strive to teach my children to rejoice in the awe and wonder of the foot, the body, and the water. And I am so grateful to have this community here to help me teach them make a joyful noise for the presence of God in their every day lives.