

EVERLASTING ARMS
Randall Tremba
November 2, 2014
All Saints' Sunday
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Psalm 107

*We give thanks to You, who are the Source of Love;
whose Light shines forth throughout the universe!
Come, awaken our hearts that we might do your Work;
For, without You, we can do nothing;
'tis your Love that loves through us.*

Last Sunday, in lieu of a sermon, Pat Dick and Greg Lloyd shared personal reflections on the lessons and Psalm appointed for that day.

We do this several times a year. It gives me a break from my weekly routine and gives you a break from me. It allows us all to hear different voices and consider diverse insights. It also encourages those selected to read scripture in a deeper way.

If you missed the two reflections last Sunday, both are posted on our web site. Pat's entitled, "Face to Face." And Greg's, "My Dwelling Place."

When Pat and Greg agreed in August to do reflections on Sunday, October 26th they didn't know what the lessons or Psalm for that day would be. They would just take their chances that something decent and manageable would show up in the lectionary, that 50 some year old schedule of lessons and Psalms for each and every Sunday of the Church Year.

Ethel and I met with Greg and Pat in September to preview the appointed lessons and Psalm for that particular Sunday. And this was the luck of the draw: Deuteronomy 34, Matthew 22 and Psalm 90.

Greg chose the Psalm, which as you saw or will see was serendipitous for him. Pat chose the Old Testament and gospel lessons for the day.

The Old Testament lesson was about the death of the great law-giver Moses and the gospel lesson was a question pertaining to the greatest law of all. *What is the greatest commandment*, someone asked rabbi Jesus. To which Jesus replied: *Love God with all your heart, body, mind and soul and the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. And that, said Jesus, is the summation of the Law and the Prophets.* In other words, there is nothing greater than love.

Pat dug deep into the lessons.

Moses, she pointed out, may have been the epic liberator and nation builder of Israel. He may have formulated fabulous laws but none is greater than the first: *You shall have no other God before this One.* And since we have since discovered that God is love and those who abide in love abide in God, the number One commandment, as Pat declared, must be Love. Love is the heart of reality. Love is our vision.

Pat observed how that Moses led the people of Israel out of bondage through a wilderness toward a Promise Land, which turns out to be like our own journey over and over again—out of bondage to fear and self and toward a Promise, the Promise and Possibilities of Love. Moses glimpsed the Promise from a mountaintop, but didn't quite get there. None of us does, as Pat noted. But it is the vision that keeps us on the way. And thus Pat invited us to sing: "Be Thou My Vision, O Lord of my Heart."

Next it was Greg's turn. Greg took up the Psalm appointed for that day. Psalm 90.

Lord, you have been our dwelling in place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

In other words, before there was anything we were already one with God. Can you get your mind around that?

Greg read each word slowly, then paused to note that the world in which we live is God's dwelling place, too. Here on this planet, within the web of life, we are one with God, not separate. And, oh, how it must grieve God's heart, Greg said, to see how greed drives us to abuse this beautiful and sacred home, to destroy wild life habitats and to flatten majestic mountain ranges simply to feed our appetites for more and more and more and more. How it must grieve the Lord when we turn our back on the One who gives us life.

And that life which we have been given, as Greg quietly noted—that life—this life—our life—in this realm at least—is finite and mortal. We all die. Again he slowly read the words of the Psalm.

The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

That's true for all us, Greg noted. But he also noted that for him personally, given his recent prognosis, his mortality is now existential. Staring him in the face.

He could have stopped there and left us in a puddle of tears. But he soldiered on to the next verse in the Psalm.

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

And that, he said, is like saying, "Pay attention to the here and now." For that is how we gain a wise heart.

"And, it seems to me," he added, "that a wise heart is a much better goal to have in the long run—rather than constantly striving to be better, or to have more. Because in reality, we are enough as we are. We have what it takes to make us happy because God is in our hearts. God is our dwelling place! There is enough for everyone!"

And that, as it turns out, was enough for me to ponder all week long.

"We have what it takes to make us happy because God is in our hearts. God is our dwelling place! There is enough for everyone!"

And so with Greg's words in mind I opened the Psalm appointed for today and saw this.

*We give thanks to You, who are the Source of Love;
whose Light shines forth throughout the universe!
Come, awaken our hearts that we might do your Work;
For, without You, we can do nothing;
'tis your Love that loves through us.*

Yes, our days will all pass away sooner or later and we will fly away. But in the meantime, we lean on each other because in the end love is all that matters.

And so for our dear brother Greg and for all who face trying days ahead, we keep faith, hope and love alive.

We live in the faith and in the hope that love will calm our fearful hearts. We live in the faith and in the hope that love will comfort our troubled souls. We live in the faith and

in the hope that love will heal our broken hearts. And we live in the faith and in the hope that love, and only love, will heal our broken world.

Now and forever may it be so. Amen

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HYMN

“Healer of Our Every Ill”