

Message from Pastor John
May 24, 2020

Psalm 68

1 Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him. 2 As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before God. 3 But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy.

4 Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds[a]— his name is the LORD— be exultant before him.

5 Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. 6 God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious live in a parched land.

7 O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, 8 the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel. 9 Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; you restored your heritage when it languished; 10 your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.

John 17:1-11

17 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people,[a] to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6 “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Power on High

John’s reading today gives us the details of Jesus’s last blessing of His disciples. “And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you”.

While in Luke’s gospel we read:

”While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.” The event we call the Ascension, which was celebrated in the Christian calendar last Thursday.

“carried up into heaven” & “I am no longer in the world” No wonder the disciples feared being abandoned. What does it mean?

I remember it so well, though it was so long ago that sometimes I think I dreamed it rather than lived it.

It was during that week, just after the joys of Christmas and before the challenge of New Year, “in between” days.

I was standing on a beach, the day after a significant storm, watching the roaring ocean batter the coastline. It was a low point for me, and I was feeling overwhelmed. Problems mounting, threats growing, previous decisions unchangeable, options shrinking, support minimal.

I could not help but see the waves tearing at the fabric of the beach and crashing against the rocks as a mirror of how I felt. Battered by powers beyond my control, in danger of being torn apart.

Then suddenly I did feel overwhelmed! But not by destruction!

I felt a wave of Peace flow over and through me. A peace which must have come from “on high” because it certainly did not originate from me. A Peace which has never left me.

Suddenly rather than seeing nature tearing things apart.... I saw that the beach, the rocks, the ocean and me were all part of the same creation. I saw harmony, almost violent harmony, but harmony, nevertheless.

Our Psalm for today is so ancient that it is considered to have probably been originally a pre-Judaism pagan hymn written for the Canaanite god Baal.

We must never make the mistake of imagining our ancestors as “primitive”. Their knowledge of the world, their science, their medicine and their technology were primitive compared to us. (Though they still navigated the oceans and built the pyramids!)

But they were not primitive, and they used poetic imagery to describe the power of nature and justice and authority and admitted that these powers come from “on high”. Power beyond their power. A realization

that humanity is not the center of life and is just as vulnerable as a blade of grass.

Even if they could not “explain” these powers ...they recognized them. A lesson I believe we can all learn from the present pandemic.

There are powers in the world. Powers of good and powers of evil. Powers which seem to be destructive and unrelenting. Powers which heal and complete.

Religion is one expression of admitting these things and of searching to discover if these Powers are to be feared or gloried.

Religion always teaches about obedience and rebellion, sin and grace Heaven and Hell.

That is why the ancient Israelites saw truth in a hymn to Baal and adopted and adapted it into a hymn to Yahweh, One God our Father.

Ancient Israelites were convinced that God “on high” would one day send someone to bridge the gap, to close the loop, to forever connect power up there with us down here. A Savior a mediator a Jesus of Nazareth.

When I read that Moses saw a burning bush and had to remove his shoes because he was on Holy ground.

When I hear Jesus says “take this bread and wine they are my flesh and blood”; “the Father will send a Counsellor”; “you will not be alone”
When I hear Jesus say: Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me”

When I hear Jesus say “Be not afraid. I am with you even to the end of time” Then I know that Peace which flooded over me and has never left is real.

Then I know that there is one supreme Power over all things and that any distance between it and us is closed in Jesus.

Then I know that next week at Pentecost we shall celebrate the realization that there is one God of power and might not just “on high” but right here, right now.

A God of Power and Love.