

January 8, 2012

Watchword:

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor.

Psalm 29:2

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 29

Biblical background for Psalm 29

Commentary from excerpts from *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*

- This psalm is traditionally associated with the celebration of the baptism of the Lord. It stands as a reminder that the God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ is the cosmic ruler of the universe. God is the unavoidable power at the center of everything, the source and end of all existence. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians know that God is good – the faithful loving source of our hope. It reminds us that God’s reign is cosmic in scope, revealed in and through everything that exists.
- Psalm 29 calls all creation, heavenly beings and human beings, to worship the Lord of glory at whose voice nature itself trembles. The dominant image in the psalm is the mighty voice of God. The prophetic word we hear in the psalm warns against ways by which we domesticate and trivialize the God of glory. God’s voice, God’s Word has power to accomplish all that God intends, though not in the ways we might have imagined.
- If contemporary Christians tend to emphasize God’s grace expressed in the self-sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, this passage forcefully reasserts God’s irresistible might and glorious power. If contemporary Protestant Christians tend to emphasize Scripture as the sole source of knowledge about God and God’s way, this psalm reminds us that God also reveals Godself to all creatures through the general patterns and events of natural world.
- There is no clue in this psalm *why* God’s people need “strength” and “peace.” Their predicament could be a natural disaster (flood, famine, drought, etc.) -- or it could just as easily be political oppression, war, or exile. The point is, it does not matter what the predicament might be. At any time, under any circumstances when “storm clouds” roll, God’s sovereign power is available to bless and deliver God’s people, to give them peace even in the midst of storms. The same God who rules over the universe, whose “voice” sends forth the thunderstorm, is the God of Israel -- the One in whom they can trust and to whom their prayers ascend.
- Too often worship in mainline churches is not characterized by a sense of the awesome majesty of God whose mighty voice “breaks the cedars . . . shakes the wilderness . . . causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare” (vv. 5-9). More often than not our worship is tame and thoroughly predictable. The problem comes when believers do not expect anything to happen in worship. They approach worship casually, almost nonchalantly, hoping only to hear some practical piece of advice or to escape the problems of the world for an hour and lose themselves in an aesthetically satisfying experience. Worship is oriented horizontally toward the worshiper. The worship the psalmist describes is directed toward the living God who sits enthroned in the heavens. The worship going on here expresses awe to a transcendent and sovereign God, a God who is shrouded in mystery and power.

Question for reflection:

If God’s voice came from the heavens and said something about you, what might that be?

Loving Hearts United: A Moravian Guide for Family Living Connector:

History of project

Read through *Remembering Your Baptism* pages 160-161. This will tie the watchword passage to the *Loving Hearts United* guide by using each of the 6 elements which will help participants remember and celebrate their baptisms. Invite individuals to share which elements might work best in their family's week.

Worship table today is constructed today around the baptism theme.

Explain that each week we will be sharing biblical background of the watchword passage and then concentrating on one of the six elements of *Loving Hearts United*.

Closing Prayer: How can it be that you are the God who created the universe, who sends forth the thunderstorms, yet who knows each of us by name? Amen

January 15, 2012

Watchword Passage:

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Psalm 139:17

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 139

Biblical Background for Psalm 139

Commentary from excerpts from *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*

- Speaking about God tends to tie theologians up in tense knots of contradiction. God is transcendent but also immanent, just but also gracious, omnipotent but also personal. The wonder of this cherished psalm is that it knits these complex threads of God's nature together into a single garment of divine providence. Greek philosophical categories have done a disservice to Christian theology by conceiving God as superlative, unchanging perfection. They present an aloof, static God far removed from the cares and affairs of finite human beings. The psalmist on the other hand, offers a Jewish vision of God as intimately involved and profoundly concerned as well as transcendent. Because God is at the farthest reaches of the universe and the most secret depths of the human heart, God is the constant companion, who cannot be escaped, fooled, or ignored. "You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me." (v.5)
- The psalmist insists that before we know or name God, God knows and names us. It is the theme of great pastoral significance that echoes throughout Scripture, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer. 1:5a). The psalmist addresses and invites us to trust the God whose sovereign grace encompasses us in ways we can never fully comprehend. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is so high that I cannot attain it. (v.6.)
- The general spirit of the psalm is not fear but trust, not guilt but praise, not judgment but grace. The question of identity, "Who am I?" is particularly urgent in our time. It is not only teenagers who struggle with a sense of identity. It is the parent whose children are all away from home for the first time. It is the retiree who has nowhere to go in the morning. It is the caregiver whose spouse has died after a long illness. . . . Even we, who do not know who we are, are nevertheless fully known and eternally loved by the Lord to whom alone we belong "body and soul in life and death." Psalm 139 invites us to receive an identity rooted not in the things we say about ourselves or the labels others assign us, but in the One who knows us more deeply and more lovingly than we could ever know ourselves. Because the God who knows us thoroughly loves us fully, our lives have a worth that cannot be taken from us by others or ourselves. The value of our lives doesn't come from what we achieve or possess or what others may think of us. It comes from the God who knows and names us, from whose steadfast love nothing can ever separate us.
- In the third stanza, the psalmist affirms God as his creator, the one who "formed" him and "knit" him together (v.13). He was known by God even then --both his beginning and all the days of his life (vv. 15-16). Yet when the psalmist tries to meditate on God's thoughts, he is overwhelmed by the weight and number of them (vv.17-18). The only things that the psalmist can know and comprehend about God are that God's works are wonderful (v. 14-cf. God's knowledge in v. 6), and that when his comprehension of God fails, God is still present with him (v.18).

Question for reflection:

How do you most often experience God –as the Creator of the Universe or the One who knows the inmost secrets of your heart? Perhaps you might underline specific words or passages which convey the nearness and vastness of God.

Loving Hearts United: A Moravian Guide for Family Living Connector:

This week will focus upon activities in the *Greeting the Day* category. We will draw from the Watchword for the Week, from prayers and blessings which will lead your family into their day, and from activities designed to connect your family as they embark upon their work, school and vocations.

Examples to share:

- ❖ *I Arise Today*, page 44. Younger children and some older children will be interested in responding with their hands and/or bodies while some children or teens might prefer to illustrate or simply write out St. Patrick's Breastplate Prayer onto a slip of paper to carry in their pocket or book bag.
- ❖ *Out the Door*, page 24. Whether you are in a hurry and might need to bless one another with a peace sign across your chests, or out your car window, or you might find the time to give a sign of blessing in a slower or more intentional way, here are some blessings from bible which you might find helpful. You will find more benedictions in Appendix 2 on page 167, or you may discover or write your own.
- ❖ *Value Rocks*, page 28. These works can be placed on your worship table for today
- ❖ *What to Wear*, page 82, is an activity which is especially good for older children, middle and high school-aged family members.

Worship Table for the day: Bibles, Daily Texts, rocks.

Closing Prayer: Use Psalm 139 and read alternating verses, concluding with the Lord's Prayer

January 22, 2012

Watchword:

Trust him at all times, pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Psalm 62:8

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 62

Biblical Background for Psalm 62

Commentary from excerpts from *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*

- In the opening paragraph of his *Confessions*, Augustine declares that humans are made for God and, therefore, “our hearts are restless until we find our rest in you.” The spirit of Psalm 62 is very much the same, professing that the only peace available to mortals is found in the bosom of the Divine. “For God alone my soul waits in silence for my hope is from him” (vs.5). [This Psalm] asserts that because we are made by and for God, to place our hope anywhere else is self-defeating. There is no resting place for our hearts, no trustworthy object of hope and meaning, other than God, who is all in all.
- The psalmist’s waiting in silence is not wordless passivity . . . It is as James Mays, retired professor of Old Testament, says, “a quietness of soul, an inner stillness that comes from yielding all fears and anxieties and insecurities to God in an act of trust.” We are invited to pour out our hearts to God in prayer, seeking God’s help in whatever situation of distress we may find ourselves.
- The fundamental question of faith is not “What do you believe?” but “Whom do you trust?” In Psalm 62, the psalmist confesses and exhorts trust in God as the only sensible way of orienting one’s life. God is unshakable and immovable, like a rock or fortress. Because the psalmist’s trust is anchored in God “my rock and my salvation, my fortress,” he is able to declare, not in arrogance, but in quiet trust, “I shall never be shaken.”
- The intersection of ultimate power and undying love, God alone is worthy of absolute trust and the foundation of persistent hope. By comparison, all other things are weak as reeds and erratic as the wind. The career that shows such promise, the children that seem so exceptional, the nation that appears so strong: they are like shifting sand, which offers no security, no permanent purchase . . . Only in the light of God do these other commitments become valuable. Apart from it, family, work, nation, even church are simply “delusions,” according to the psalmist (v. 9), or “vanity,” in the words of Ecclesiastes . . . the psalmist exhorts us to place our trust in God alone. God is the only source of hope and peace for mortals. If life has any significance, it will be found in God. If our families, communities, nations, and churches have any worth, it will be located in God.
- Psalm 62 offers [us] the opportunity to explore what it means to trust God in a risky, precarious world in which such expressions of trust can easily appear out of touch with reality. Faith does not shut its eyes to the assaults that best us. It does not place its trust in those who seem to be the “winners” of the game of life. Faith clings to and relies on the living God alone.

Questions for reflection:

How does this psalm encourage you in a more faithful life?

What are some ways that your trust in God anchors you?

Loving Hearts United: *A Moravian Guide for Family Living* Connector:

This week we will focus upon *Mealttime* as a time to share gratitude, fellowship and to enjoy God's good gifts by having a meal together. These sessions provide time together to share table blessings, stories, everyday meals, special meals, and hospitality with each other.

Examples to share:

- ❖ *Talk*, page 22. You may draw suggestions for table conversations from your family formation container in Appendix 2 on page 176
- ❖ *Bible Verse Napkin Rings*, page 84, is an activity which can be shared with children who live in two different homes or a time when they are visiting a friend of the family or a grandparent.
- ❖ *Lovefeast Lunch*, page 26. Shake it up in terms of who typically serves the family.
- ❖ *One New Thing*, page 106. This activity can be used for participants of any age.

Worship Table can include various printed or hand-written table blessings, bread, a cup and a formation container.

Closing

January 29, 2012

Watchword:

The fear of the Lord is the Beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. Psalm 111:10

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 111

Biblical Background for Psalm 111

Commentary from excerpts from Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1

- We human creatures seem to be born to wonder, to love, and to praise. We work, we speak, we create, and we make and keep covenants together. Wonder, love, and praise are expressions of our deepest being and deepest longing. No matter what happens to us or what we achieve, they point us to something greater, something better that surrounds our lives and makes us glad. Lost in wonder, we are opened up to praise the divine Source of all things.
- Those who revere (“fear”) God live in a larger world, because they allow themselves to be open to something greater, something better that lies deeply within even the most ordinary experiences. It is so easy to let our lives be defined by the little world we have created through habits of mind and body that do not allow anything that may lie beyond to be registered in our awareness.
- It is all about cultivating a sense of the presence of God. To live as if there were no God is to live in a space too small for our souls to grow and flourish. Praise the Lord, then, for the works of God are great, and there is great delight in studying them in the company of the faithful (v.2).
- Christians who read this Psalm together as part of their common worship join with their spiritual ancestors and present day Jewish brothers and sisters in a common song of praise. Such Christians know that there is an intimate connection between God’s unfathomable gift of love in Jesus Christ and their response of faithfulness. Faith in Christ means letting our lives be shaped by taking God’s love to heart. We receive love by becoming loving, just as we receive grace by becoming gracious.
- How often do we, as God’s gathered folk, take the time to trample back through time and “study” the Lord’s great works or tread within the unfolding of each day to discern the spirit of a living Lord? How is it that we come to sing God’s praise with reckless abandon and deep joy, beginning with God’s activity in our own lives and turning to God’s activity in the world? What might help us to come to the place where we shout hallelujah!
- In the end, then, the Psalmist’s prays of God’s work reminds the congregation to get back to our work, namely, to “fear of the Lord”. (v.10). “Fear of the Lord” is a way of life, a posture in the world that acknowledges God’s sovereignty and the place of humanity (our capacities and limitations) before God and creation. For the psalmist as for the ancient sages, such a posture is the “beginning” of wisdom (v 10a). The term re’shith has a range of meaning. On the one hand, it can be interpreted temporally as “beginning or starting point” suggesting that “fear of the Lord” is the prerequisite, the foundation for wisdom. On the other, it may be read qualitatively, as “first, best, or epitome”, in which case “fear of the Lord” is the quintessential expression of wisdom. The psalmist thus designates “fear of the Lord” as the beginning and end of wisdom. Knowledge begins and ends with praise.
- The beginning of wisdom begins with fear of the Lord – not fear in the sense of outright paralyzing terror closing in from all sides, but fear in the sense of reverence. Fear in the sense of awe for the Lord’s amazing deeds. This fear and awe allowed Shiprah and Puah, the Egyptian midwives, to seek life for infant Hebrew children.

- The church is called to be the visible and witnessing community of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We see patterns for such an unfolding narrative when we are sent into places where we can sing hallelujah's and live the good news of the gospel while at the same time we listen with the Spirit and discern God at work. As we receive God's call to serve whether making up lyrics from the backseat of a minivan or sitting down with strangers at table together, we practice praise, and live into God's promise.

Questions for reflection:

How do you understand the reverence (or fear) of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom?

Do you fear God with a sense of terror or awe? Or neither?

When have you uttered the phrase "My God look at that" and meant it as an exclamation of praise?

Loving Hearts United: A Moravian Guide for Family Living Connector:

The focus is on gathering where we connect with one another as a family community of faith. Activities are to help facilitate family community, faith discussions, worship devotions, enjoyment of time that is special together.

Examples to Use:

- ❖ *A Time for Family Silence*, page 106, life-giving and necessary for our culture today
- ❖ *Movie Night*, page 102
- ❖ *The Music of Faith*, page 82, especially good for middle schoolers
- ❖ *Thank You Walk*, page 88

Worship table would display a spiritual formation container, faith talk cards, *Gabbit*, ball

Closing Prayer:

Offer prayers of deliverance from the powers of this world

Response: *Deliver us, O Lord*

Offer prayers for needs for empowerment

Response: *Strengthen Us, O Lord*

Read together the Watchword for the week:

The fear of the Lord is the Beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. Psalm 111:10

February 5, 2012

Watchword:

Great is our Lord and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. Psalm 147:5

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 147

Biblical Background for Psalm 147

Commentary based on *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*

- In a culture built on differences and organized distinctions, a view from beyond us, unconfined by our smallness and nearsightedness, provides a much needed correction. It reframes everything, pointing out the great continuities and connections on which we daily depend without much thought. To see the whole world and see it steadily is to feel that we belong in a “place just right.” We are at home in the universe after all, not just strangers in a strange place.
- This Psalm sees the whole world with a deep steadiness at the heart of things. Whether one thinks of the great round of life, the starry heavens, the creative and destructive forces of nature, or the gentle care of the needy and wounded, it is the Lord who creates and governs them all.
- We may have restocked the bird feeder or run the sprinkler and spread compost. Regardless, after putting away the tools and wiping sweat from our brow, we paused on the back steps or settled into the porch rocker and said, “It is good.” How silly we are! Captivated with our own creativity and control, we frequently become oblivious to our capacity to become agents of God’s grace and peace in this world. Consumed with our own creativity and control, we forget that it was God who after crafting, perused the created order and said, “It is good. “ In our own foolishness, we rush to the front of the line to take a turn at playing God.
- It is easier to live at the surface, going day by day, moving along, doing what it takes to get by, and living in the shallow end of things, living out of popular piety.
- Christians should never forget that there is nothing ungracious about nature or unnatural about grace. “Praise the Lord!” How good it is to sing praises to our God; for God is gracious and a song of praise is fitting” (v.1).

Questions for reflection:

There are so many competitive events in our society. How can we compete, but avoid the sense of always having to be a winner in the eyes of the world?

Is there a sense of gratitude in your worship service?

Where is it missing and how could it be changed?

Loving Hearts United: A Moravian Guide for Family Living Connector:

Serving and *On the Road* are the two foci for the week. *Serving* is using your family’s gifts to put Christ’s call into action. Activities include providing a family the opportunity to develop the family’s gifts through Christ’s mission, giving to others in and outside the family and serving Christ as the family.

Examples to use:

- ❖ *Many Hands Make Light Work*, page 19
- ❖ *Refreshment for Christ*, page 27, especially good for middle schoolers
- ❖ *Secret Servants*, page 32
- ❖ *Prayer Tree*, page 41
- ❖

On the Road is used to capture moments together as a family while traveling or in motion. Use travel times as a time to learn, listen, care for each other and celebrate God's creation.

Examples to use:

- ❖ *Where Does the Money Go*, page 41, will take some background work
- ❖ *Funny Signs*, page 45, especially good with middle school-aged family members
- ❖ *Litany of Keys*, page 65
- ❖ *Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore*, page 53

Worship table should display brochures about helping agencies, map, toy cars, GPS

Closing Prayer

February 12, 2012

Watchword:

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

Psalm 30:5

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 30

Biblical Background for Psalm 30

Commentary based on *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*

- The psalmist opens (vv. 1-13) with a synopsis of her suffering, prayer and God's deliverance that anticipates the longer account she provides in verses 6-12. Her praise mirrors her experience. She "extols" God, literally "lifts up" God (e.g. Isa. 25:1. Ps.99:5, 9; 107:32; 118:28) because God "drew [her] up" (*dalah*), a verb used elsewhere for drawing water from a well. The psalmist develops this imagery further in verse 3: God "brought up my soul from Sheol," the Pit.
- Early in the book of Exodus, the hands of seven working sisters dangle a cord and drew water from a well to nurture the flock under their care. Chased away, the daughters faced fearful displacement. But fear was not the end of their story. These women testified before their family about a miraculous rescue at the edge of a well: a rescue by Moses, who had been pulled out of the water himself. Moses discerned a need, stepped forward for the sisters in justice, and satisfied the thirst of their flock. (Exod. 2:16-18)
- Displaced by fears God's children sometimes complain. They cry out for rescue from the depths of life. Sometimes the cries linger for more than a night, while at other times fear constricts weeping. Eyes drip from hearts that have witnessed the despair of laboring in a violent world. Young and old alike know pain, suffering and sorrow. Bad things happen to good people. Yet even so, burdened by grief and despair, Sunday by Sunday, God's faithful people gather in sanctuaries and lift prayers before God. In prayer, the congregation sings praises to the Lord and gives thanks for God's holy name.
- Daily God's people labor before kitchen sinks; with diapers and textbooks; behind enemy lines and cash registers; beside bedsides and street signs. In the midst of such work, God's people cry before their Savior repeatedly, seeking help in navigating the day, the hour, the moment, "I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up." At other times, despair is so raw so close to the surface, that it is hard to cry.
- The psalmist models the restorative power of prayer, crying out and drawn by the God who turns our mourning into dancing and clothes us with joy. The model of prayer sculpted in Psalm 30 reveals the imaginative power of communal testimony to the Lord's salvific work in the world. Psalm 30 interweaves personal testimony and communal thanksgiving. When we've wept through the night, unable to breathe through our noses or see through swollen eyes, with a piercing glimpse of the Divine, we long for the joy that comes in the morning.
- Recalling the imagery in verse 4, the psalmist professes that God indeed turned her weeping into joy, her mourning into dancing (v. 11). With intimate language—"you took off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy" (v. 11b).
- In the church we are equipped to pray through the power of the Holy Spirit that when we find ourselves at our most prosperous place, even in despair, we might not end up terrified and spiraling out of control, unable to cry for rescue. We are equipped to pray with bold proclamation that although weeping may linger for a night, joy comes in the morning. A morning that the Lord alone brings. Like the joyful wise ones who saw the Christ child and believed the church is sent by the Holy Spirit to pray and proclaim that God alone can turn mourning into dancing and replace covert des pair with indescribable joy.

Questions for reflection:

How has suffering changed us?

Were there gifts we received during times of illness or grief?

Loving Hearts United: A Moravian Guide for Family Living Connector:

The focus is on closing the day as the time for benediction and resting in God. Family members can reflect on the day and their life together through prayer, giving thanks, listening to each others stories and concerns and acknowledging God's constant kindness and care.

Examples to use:

- ❖ *Under My Pillow*, page 111
- ❖ *Special Stories*, page 49, especially good if grandparents are using the piece
- ❖ *Smiley Face*, page 75
- ❖ *Light For Everyone in the House*, page 97

Worship center might display candles, devotion books, Bible, CD player with Loving Hearts United CD

Closing Prayer

February 19, 2012

Watchword:

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as servants for Jesus' sake. 11 Corinthians 4:5

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 121, which is the Psalm for the first Sunday in Lent on page 143.

Families are invited to participate in the centers for Ash Wednesday and Lent as found in **Loving Hearts United: A Moravian Guide for Family Living**, pages 142-144.

Worship center should have, **Loving Hearts United: A Moravian Guide for Family Living**, Book of Worship, Daily Texts 2012, a candle, a cross and a sample family covenant.

Closing:

Share a potluck celebration meal and intentionally set your families together so that they can create their own Family Covenant, found on pages 8-9 in **Loving Hearts United: A Moravian Guide for Family Living**. During and after the meal some families, (especially families with younger children), may choose to decorate frames for their covenants and then work on their covenants at home, or families may share this time at their table talking about and designing their covenants. Remember there will be a sample family covenant.