

“My Heart Sings for Joy”

Psalm 84

Luke 18:9-14

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In Psalm 84, we see the psalmist is having a good day! Other days may not be so peachy keen, but this day is a good day. He or she looks out on the grandeur of Creation and feels like singing! The psalmist notices the sparrow and the swallow and is simply awed by these nest-building, feathered creatures. The writer looks around and sees many people living by faith, finding their strength in the abundance of God, finding their peace in knowing that God is their shield. The poet we call the psalmist finds she needs to express her gratitude in song. Her offering is her song.

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!”

This Psalm is so appropriate for our Gratitude Sunday! On Gratitude Sunday, we get so in touch with our own gratitude that we can't contain ourselves; something inside us wants to bubble up and spill out in the form of music! Some of us hum; some play the flute; some sing an aria; some make a joyful noise, some just clap their hands! I instantly picture Julie Andrews singing, “The hills are alive with the sound of music!” And, “These are a few of my favorite things!” I picture Louis Armstrong singing, “I see trees of green, red roses too, I see them bloom for me and you. And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.”

I like the idea of being carried away with gratitude! Let me tell you what I'm grateful for today, what carries me away! I am grateful for neighbors whose children wave to me when they ride by on their bikes! I am grateful for the aroma of bread baking and asparagus steaming, and garlic roasting and coffee brewing I am grateful for a religious tradition that chooses to exclude no one.

I am grateful for a church where children and youth are valued. I am grateful for the texture of woolen blankets and prayer shawls and piano keys. I am grateful for firemen and first responders and state troopers who all watch out for my safety and slow me down when they need to and come to my aide when I need a helping hand.

I am carried away by love and by banjo music and by key lime pie. I guess you get the idea. I am one thankful guy! Maybe I'll write a psalm of my own. I'll get Willie Nelson to figure out the chords. And I'll get our youth choir to sing it in four part harmony!

What I know is that when my soul is full of gratitude, there is no room for retaliation, no room for violence, no room for hatred, no room for harsh judgments. This is a theme that runs through many of the 150 Psalms in the Bible. Fill your heart with gratitude and miracles happen; healing happens; the unlovable ones become lovable. The unforgiveable ones become forgivable. When we fill our souls with gratitude, the Kingdom of God is near.

I find I can be grateful even when there is misery in my world. I find I can be grateful even when things aren't going my way. Andy Weatherwax has been my teacher in this matter. Most of you know Andy. He grew up in the Buttonball School district. He is a South Church person. He is also a Buddhist. He is a husband and a dad. He is a poet and a philosopher. He has mastered the art of balancing stones on stones. He knows about inner balance. He also has Parkinson's Disease. Some of his poems are humorous as he describes losing control of his arms and legs in the checkout line at the grocery store. But, by far, his most profound poem describes his gratitude for this illness that has dominated his adult life. Andy writes,

this is a gift
and I am ill with it
it bounces around my brain
slowly seizing my ability
to move
to speak
to think

this is a gift, I told my six-year-old son
not the type you wrap with a bow
not a gift you would wish upon anyone

there was a time when my musings strayed to madness
my thoughts to terror
there was a time I would blame the moon
for its blurred reflection in turbulent waters

but gratitude's exquisite blossom now fills my heart
leaving fear no recourse
clarity returns, and I can see the moon

this is a gift of understanding of the suffering
caused by illness, old age, and death

this is a gift of compassion
that puts self-pity in the past
the future is forever now

I breathe
the clear sky above my head
the vegetable garden at my feet

this is a gift
and I am alive with it

Thank you, Andy Weatherwax, for teaching me to be grateful in season and out of season. In my life, I have had many astounding teachers. Andy is one of them. It would be correct to say he is a modern day psalmist.

On Gratitude Sunday, we get in touch with our own gratitude for the evidence of God's presence in our lives. In a sense, we are all psalmists today. We all have something to sing about!

In the 1970's, I watched Sesame Street sometimes three times a day. We'd listen to Kermit the Frog lament about being green, how it's not easy being green. But by the end of his song, he's begun to name the really cool things about being green.

Getting in touch with our gratitude is what makes all the difference. In a way, every Sunday is Gratitude Sunday! Every day is Gratitude Day! For when we're conscious of our gratitude, we are living in the greatest of hope. Amen