

Read Psalm 138

I have come to really appreciate this section of the book of Psalms. Psalm 138 serves as a spearhead to the end of the book which is full of adoration and praise to God. To read these psalms is to turn to a buffet full of glory to God on the highest. No one will walk away with hunger pains, but everyone will walk away hungry for more: thanksgiving, honor, deliverance, preservation, dignity, exaltation, care, compassion, presence, salvation, praise, praise, praise. **“Great is the glory of the Lord!”**

And something else these psalms do is center. They serve to provide a centering focus in which we can turn to reclaim our core sacred story: a story remembering the day when we called and God answered mightily; a story recalling God’s saving work that has clearly been seen, felt, and thus trusted; a story reminding us that despite what the world might be groaning, God has not forgotten us or forsaken us.

Despite a world littered with threats and insecurities that can haunt our lives and the memories of the redeemed. Despite a world in which terrorist attacks are headline news all over the world and the spectrum of threat levels color our individual and collective anxieties- constantly at a “yellow or orange”, meaning elevated or high risk. Despite any trepidation that settles into the deep recesses of our minds and souls. The psalmist declares before us, “we walk in the midst of trouble.” Despite this sorrowful and despairing reality, we do not need to be defined by them. As a matter of fact, as God’s own, holy and beloved, we shall not be defined or overcome by them. **“For God’s steadfast love and God’s faithfulness,”** we can sing the Lord’s praises, bow down and give thanks, and find hope in the goodness of God.

As I have sat and wrestled with this text from Psalm 138- yes, it is possible to have a wrestling match with scripture- a common question continued to rise, “What is the one thing, the most important thing, we can pass on to the next generation?” Do you ever consider that in reflection? Whether you are a parent, grandparent, aunt, or uncle, by blood or honorary status, I hope so.

Did you know, in research done with emerging adults, that includes those from the age of 19 to about 35 transitioning from being home and parent dependent to independent, the one thing they feel is the most important in their life is a stable job that provides financial security? Overwhelmingly so, this is their baseline for life and all that they are to do in growing up is geared toward helping them establish a stable job that provides financial security. On the surface, we may accept that answer and

maybe even think, “good for them.” I mean, who can argue that a stable job with financial security is a bad thing? To be clear, I am not hinting they are.

However, when asked about their spiritual well-being and faith and possible involvement with the church- a community committed to helping people grow in their spiritual well-being and faith- one of the most common responses was “unless it can help me get a job or make money, it can hang out on the back burner for when I really need it or have time for it or have finally accomplished the other.” In the spirit of the Grammy’s last Sunday, it reminds me of Jelly Roll’s song, “God, I need a favor.” Are there alarms going off in your head, too?

During my wrestling match, I was exposed to an article entitled, *The Transformation of Allen School*. Allen School is an inner-city school in Dayton, Ohio. It was for many years at the bottom of the list in that city by all measures. There were fifth graders who had parole officers. The dropout rate was incredible and saddening. The failure of those students in every aspect of their lives sickened the heart. And along came a new principal, a principal who—it’s relevant to note—came from the Philippines, a culture which has an inherent respect for things spiritual in a way American culture does not. And he brought the teachers together and said to them, in substance, as his very first proclamation as principal, that:

“We have to start to understand that the young people we are working with have nothing of external substance or support. They have dangerous neighborhoods. They have poor places to live. They have little food to eat. They have parents who are on the ropes and barely able to pay attention to them. The externals with which American education is obsessed will not work in this situation. But these students have one thing that no one can take away from them. They have their souls. And from this day forth in this school, we are going to lift those souls up. We are going to make those souls visible to the young people themselves and to their parents and to the community. We are going to celebrate their souls, and we are going to reground their lives in the power of their souls. And that will require this faculty recovering the power of their own souls, remembering that we, too, are soul-driven, soul-animated creatures.”

The article continues... And in a five-year period, that school, the Allen School in Dayton, Ohio, rose to the top of every dimension on which it had been at the bottom, through hard work, through disciplined work, but through attentiveness to the inward factors that we are here to explore. This is not romanticism. This is the real world. And this is what is desperately needed....

What is the one thing, the most important thing, we can pass on to the next generation? An education, financial stability, skills of how to do a trade... shelter, food, water... are all

good things, however one could debate that none of these are the most important. What lies at our core, at our center, in our souls, is the foundation of everything else. No matter the external variables or circumstances either opening doors of opportunity or beating us like a drum, our spiritual well-being, our faith in God, and the truth of God's goodness and glory given to us in love, grace, mercy, and hope, is what really fills us with complete joy and assurance.

We grow up and we have a stable job with financial security. What then? Is that it? Is that really the key? No! Truth is we don't know what the future holds and there is no worldly accomplishment or material that is guaranteed to last forever. The most important thing for us all is to be able to claim our core sacred story, and as life continues, reclaim our core sacred story over and over again, as many times as necessary to maintain our hope in the one and only Lord God Almighty.

What we all need more than anything, then, now, and always, is to be in covenant relationship with a God who is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, whose steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting; is to know we are God's child and that God loves us; is to trust that God is able to help us and will be with us in all times and circumstances; is to reclaim God at the core of our life story as well as our spiritual story. The psalmist charges us that each day, no matter the external variables or circumstances, we can reclaim our core sacred story that we are God's and God is good and great is the glory.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard?” declares Isaiah. **“The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. God gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”** (Isaiah 40:28-31). And I believe this strength to be available to us now, not just waiting for us in eternity. God wants us all to thrive now, in the life given to us by God, and God wants us to share in our lifelong journey with God.

The charge to reclaim our core sacred story carries into the New Testament lessons as well. Even though we are God's children, co-heirs with Christ, we have a tendency and temptation to forget, get distracted, veer off course, get lost, and when we do, we must reclaim our center, our bearings.

Fanny Crosby, in 1873, claimed the most important bearings for us all, in her hymn, “Blessed Assurance.” “Blessed Assurance” is an exploration of the wonder of what it means to walk presently in what Peter calls a “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3). This “living hope” means we have a reason, right now, to celebrate with the confidence to draw near to God, trusting that God will never cast us

away. “Blessed Assurance” is unashamedly happy. Words like foretaste, praising, delight, happy, goodness, and, of course, blessed give this song buoyancy. In a cynical world, a hymn like this is refreshing. “Blessed Assurance” is not a false sense of optimism, it is the sure and eternal benefits of the work of Christ given to the believer. “Blessed Assurance” invites us to “draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). Like the psalmist, our hope for happiness and peace is not wishful thinking. It is based on what we have already been promised because of the finished work of Christ—a blessed assurance that Jesus is ours.

*Blessed assurance; Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.*

*Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above, Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.*

This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long.