

Text: Psalm 66
Title: Route 66
Date: 07.03.22
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A few weeks ago, while in upstate New York, I got up early to go for a run – or what now passes as running. I wanted to beat the heat of the day, breathe the mountain air, and work-out the kinks of too much time in planes, trains, and automobiles.

Running in the foothills of the Adirondacks, I heard a hawk screech overhead and the rustle of a snake underfoot. I limped and lumbered along as the morning sun slipped through birch and evergreen. The Mohawk River lackadaisically-drifted-by as the last vestiges of mountain brooks splashed over root and rock. Under a bluebird sky, the distant mountains looked like green broccoli tops, and all seemed right in the world....

I was reminded that there's a certain indifference to creation. We can be tightly wound with worry and conflict can twist us into pretzels – while rivers, hills, and hawks shrug their shoulders and continue to do their nature thing. I woke that morning worried about Hope, the CRC, and my own doubts and demons while the cosmos just went about its business. I could feel my body relax as my attention turned to the created order.

I didn't raise my hands in praise,
or have any unique insight or inspiration,
but I was reminded again that our particular concerns
are little, limited, and transient in the grandeur of creation.

Dear friends, it's freeing to be reminded that the details of our lives are held in a cosmic framework. Our travails and troubles, while they can be substantial, don't move the needle for the glory of creation.

John Calvin refers to creation as the theater of God's glory. He puts it this way:

But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance...in the creation of the universe he brought forth those insignia whereby he shows his glory to us, whenever and wherever we cast our gaze...wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory.

Which is why the psalmist begins by calling “all the earth” to shout for joy to God. The first instruction in Psalm 66 is given to creation. The first 8 verses set a grand stage where “all the earth bows down” to God.

Maybe that's a good place to start.

May this psalm serve as encouragement to listen for creation singing and shouting God's glory. In the still of the morning, in watering plants during the golden hour, in hiking in the woods or laying by a lake, in reading in the shade or feeling the sun on your face, in

looking up at a stary-stary night, in holding a toddler's hand or pushing a loved one's wheelchair outdoors, etc. In these summer months let us turn our attention to the theater of God's glory.

My guess is that you'll find moments of perspective, gratitude, and comfort in God's providence, power, and peace. My guess is you'll find yourself humming along with creation.

And maybe that's a good place to end.

Go thou and do likewise. Go spend the summer outdoors and report back about God's handiwork. Go enjoy God's theater. Go catch a spark of God's glory. Go walk among the willows, taste a wild raspberry pulled from a vine, and feel a summer rain. Chances are the racket will quiet, your breath will settle, and you'll find yourself joining the chorus of creation.

A deist would like the opening verses of Psalm 66. It doesn't ask anything of us. Creation belts out God's glory, like a showtune, and we have the freedom to pay attention. Seems like a win-win. There's no instruction to go to church, or remember God in prayer and spiritual practice; there's no identification of God beyond creation. We're off the hook; the first imperative is directed at creation.

However, then the image shifts from the widest angle to something human-sized. The psalmist moves from calling "all the earth" to calling "all peoples." The shift is from earth bowing-down to humanity bowing-down. And, in calling "all peoples," the psalmist writes of being brought out of prison, going through fire and water, and coming to a place of abundance.

Now. The reference here is to the Hebrew exodus from Egyptian captivity to the Promised Land, but the bigger thematic shift is from creation to liberation, and what was first cosmic gives way to communal testimony.

11 years ago, one of my best friends called as he entered a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility. He'd called before, he'd been in rehab before, but this time he said he was going to die if he didn't get clean and sober. He stood to lose his wife, his family, his career, his life. He felt like this was his last chance. And if memory serves, he did 45 days of inpatient rehab and then 90 AA meetings in 90 days. He's spent the last 11 years working the 12 steps of AA. He's been going to meetings, sponsoring other guys, going to funerals, and leading a meeting in the state penitentiary.

To use the psalmist's language, he's been through fire and water. Burned and 'bout drowned, today he's in a place of abundance. He's a husband, father, grandfather, and friend. Today he bears witness to a Higher Power, a community, and a program that kept him, held him, and saved him. Today he offers testimony of his rescue.

The first move of Psalm 66 goes from creation shouting God's glory to people praising God because of his saving activity. The detail the psalmist offers suggests an accounting, a testimony, of God's intervention.

I don't have a dramatic story, you may not either, but we're instructed – as part of all people – to bear witness not just to God's work in creation but God's work in salvation. The references in Psalm 66 point to the exodus, but the movement, or the pattern, or the route...

is from all creation to all people,
and from God the Creator to God the Savior,
and from praise to testimony.

I don't want to read too much into this psalm, stretch it beyond its intentions, or see things that aren't there, but it seems like there is a sort of map here, or a route for a biblical spirituality.

We start with creation, move through bondage, and come to liberation.

We start with goodness, know guilt, and are delivered by grace.

Too much?

There's one more move.

There's one more stop on Route 66....

In verse 13 the focus narrows yet again. It goes from all creation, to all people, and it ends with an individual. From cosmic to communal it lands on the singular. The pronouns go from plural to personal. Psalm 66 ends with the psalmist entering the temple to offer expressions of religious devotion.

From the instruction for all the earth to “shout for joy to God” we now hear the invitation:

*Come and hear, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what he has done for me.*

Dear friends, when Erin and I first talked about this sermon series we thought about pairing psalms with testimonies – the songs and stories of summer. I had no idea that the first psalm we'd consider ended with an invitation to testimony. And, I had no idea that this first psalm would be paired with Anna's profession of faith.

But here we are, profoundly blessed to have been part of Anna's journey and to join her in celebrating belonging to God in Christ. Thanks be to God.

So, if the beginning of this psalm is the encouragement to join “all nature in manifold witness” we end with the encouragement to testimony, to sharing with one another what God has done for us. If we can be faithful in going outside this summer, can we also be faithful in entering the temple to bear witness in worship?

What has God done for you?

Where is God present in your life and experience?

What are the laments and longings of your heart?

What story do you have to tell?

We still have plenty of open Sundays. Please let me know if you're willing to offer a short testimony of God's activity in your life.

Oh! One last thing. The last line in Psalm 66 reads like this:

Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

Other translations have it as not “withheld his mercy from me.” The word in question is a form of *hesed* – that slippery word describing God’s loyal, steadfast, lovingkindness. Psalm 66 may start with creation, move to liberation, and lead to personal testimony, but the last word is God’s love. The last word is God’s mercy. The last stop of a biblical spirituality is the never-ending love of God.

Makes you want to sing, or shout, or tell somebody....

Thanks be to God.

Amen.