

How do you think it might be written today?

How might you write it today?

How does it feel when we experience that yearning today -
and how might you write about it?

The Psalms are expressions of feelings. They are poetry.
Speaking to one of the Psalms is different than speaking to the gospels
or the Old Testament stories.

I want to talk about this Psalm this morning:

“How lovely is they dwelling place...

My soul yearns for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”

And – I want to share with you a prayer – a psalm – that is written in a similar style -
although in a very different time.

The theme is still how God is present -
and how we perceive it and count on it and share it.

Where does God dwell?

My soul – my heart – my flesh



A theologian and psychologist in Australia named Francis Macnab studied this psalm.

You might say he tried to get into the mind and experience of the ancient writer.

What was really on his mind?

What lead him to say what he did – to phrase the words as he did?

Macnab studied it carefully and wrote about what he found.

He said – “I found the writer emphatically and repetitively proclaiming
a fairly revolutionary view of the world – creation – his beliefs about God -
about humanity – the human spirit – about human potential.”

I found his psychology had long pre-empted our current psychological study –
about happiness – even.

Macnab thought that this writer of Psalm 84 seemed to know an awful lot about what psychologists
have determined shapes our lives.

This very early writing in human history (at least to us)
is remarkable in its insight into the way we think and feel.

After his study – Macnab recreates the psalm as he thinks it might be written today.

Here is how it goes:



O God – from my place in the working world – and the wide wilderness of life -
I long for that sure sense of knowing what it is all about.
I yearn for that experience of joy – to come to my whole body and soul.
I look for your presence as a pathway to life’s fullness.

Though we are often wounded and hurt in this fractured world -
we discover that this world also has its source of healing.
We are all enriched and our hearts are made stronger -
as we tap into that power that flows into us.

The very sight of a spring of water -
arouses our anticipation of being refreshed and renewed.
From all our external involvements – we hear the call of our inner spirits.

God – you stand in front of us when we fear the future.
In our dark times you bring the sun to shine again.
our of our troubles you point us to the pathway of our best bliss.
And as we receive – we are rich indeed!



That’s the contemporary Psalm 84 – what this contemporary writer offers us.

The ancient psalmist and the contemporary psalmist both suggest
we experience the divine in ourselves -
in our bodies – in our actions – in our everyday lives.

The ancient writer pictures the divine center as something we long to draw toward us.
The contemporary writer pictures it more in the here and now – already drawn into us.



We have done some reading in the Gospel of John in recent weeks -
and we have seen how different it is from the other gospels.
In some of that reading – the writers attempt to describe the physical and spiritual
as being separate entities -
to such an extent that it makes for a dichotomy of flesh and spirit.
Theologians call this dualism – and the problem with this dualism –
is that it causes us to not to think of ourselves as being body – mind – and spirit.

And yet we find that view in our tradition -
even in some of the hymns of our beloved Charles Wesley.
So it is a view expressed in scripture – but not all scripture.

This dualism has a few consequences.
It would lead us to separate body – mind – and spirit in ourselves
and it would lead us to do the same with Jesus.

Was he divine or was he human and in what ways?
Bishop John Spong speaks to that today when he says -

Jesus was not a divine visitor on earth.
He was a God infused human being.

But – people have a variety of views about this.

The point is – that theology must be a body of inquiry that is always learning -
just like any field of study.

God is in all things and all things are in God.

God is no supernatural; miracle worker in the sky -
who comes to our aid in times of need.
God is in all things and all things are in God.

One of my favorite writers – Bruce Epperly –
suggests that God is less like a hammer to the hear – than God is a gentle prod -
a tickle – sometimes as gentle as a feather – touching each moment into being.¹

The biblical writers in the gospel of John and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians -
which we read last week – all affirm that the spirit gives life.

What are some of the things the spirit gives?

The spirit gives us creativity and transformation in the lives we lead.

It leads us beyond our own interests
so we can begin integrating our well-being and the well-being of the planet.

The point is that the spirit is not just “spiritual.”
It is embodied in the rough and tumble of our everyday world.

So what is spirit and what is God?
Surely God is the source of all life -
calling us to live fully and respect life in every form.
Surely God is the source of love calling us – to love wastefully all that God has made.
Surely God is what calls us to be – all that we can be.²

And it is the poetry – the Psalm – today that reminds me of that.
“How lovely is your dwelling place – O Lord Almighty.
Where is that dwelling place? It is right here.



One of the many traditions of Christianity is the Celtic tradition -
from around the 4th century in and around England and Scotland.
One way Celtic Christianity was different from Roman Christianity - was in its organization.

Rather than a central organization from Rome it was made up of monasteries
that were often many miles from each other.

They grew and developed their own practices and beliefs.

Followers of Jesus often considered themselves pilgrims as they traveled.
As they journeyed from one place to another – they saw themselves as cared for by God.

We have many wonderful prayers from them – both old and new.

I want to close with one today because it also expresses some of the same ideas
as our ancient and contemporary psalm.

I have also given it to you in today’s written bulletin if you would like to take it with you –
especially if you are a traveler this summer.

This is the way they used a prayer like this:

Initially – standing still – the pilgrim points a finger outward -
and then rotates in a clockwise direction – until completing a circle.

During this circling a prayer is said.

See if it does not remind you of the psalmist speaking of the dwelling places of God.

Perhaps it can give new life to the ancient psalmist -
as we think about where God dwells.

The early psalmist has God in a distant dwelling place -
and the one I share now brings that dwelling place around us.

We call this a “circling” prayer:



God protect me on this journey.

Surround me – whether I walk – or drive – or fly.

Fill my heart and mind with surprising possibilities.
Remind me that I am always in the circle of your love.
Remind me this day – O Holy Adventure -
that your inspiration guides me in every situation.
Open my eyes to your presence -
in each meal – as I turn on my computer – as I start my car.
Awaken me to possibility and wonder.
Energize me to love and embrace all I meet.³



This is not an ancient prayer – but a new prayer in an ancient tradition.
This practice – this encircling – reminds the traveler
that God surrounds him or here wherever they go.
We recognize that life has its risks – and that faith cannot protect us from every threat.
But we also recognize that God is present as a force (an energy, a drive, a lure, a calling)
for the best outcome in every situation.⁴

So – I give you this prayer to take with you today.
When you travel – you might picture this ancient traveler -
the ancient pilgrim – and the circling prayer -
and let it become your own.
Maybe it will take you back to the ancient writer who put it this way -
How lovely is thy dwelling place – and where is it?
It is right here.

¹ Bruce Epperly on the *Process and Faith* website, 2006

² Adapted from John Spong, 2005

³ Bruce Epperly, 2005

⁴ Ibid