

May 25, 2008

In the space of just three verses, our psalm today spells out a whole way of being:

¹ O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvellous for me.

² But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is
with me.

³ O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.
[NRSV]

With simplicity and clarity the poet turns us from our struggles and our concerns to a simple, childlike rest in God. We are not told what the “things too great” are which he has put to one side, or why they are too great; we hear only the expression of trust, and a call for all to hear: “hope in the LORD”.

How can we hear of such trust, and respond to such a call today? In the fourth century St Augustine suggested to the church that it is, in fact, really Jesus Christ who sings the psalms. In a simple historicist sense this cannot be true. But John Calvin spoke of the Psalms as “the anatomy of all the parts of the soul”, and it is in this sense that Christ might be imagined to be the singer of the psalms. As we’ve touched upon a couple of times over the last few weeks, it cannot be emphasised enough that the one we have come to call “Christ” and “Son of God” shares in all the height and depth of our humanity.

It’s been important over the last few weeks to emphasise that this means Christ carries our humanity into the heart of God. But it’s just as important to emphasise that his divine, perfected humanity is carried also to us. Jesus offers us to God, God offers Jesus to us as *our true* humanity, this one who spans the whole range of human emotions and experiences before God. To pick up some themes from the psalms, Jesus is the one who truly exults in God, who truly suffers at the hands of his enemies, who truly is innocent and so rightly calls upon

God for vengeance and restitution. It is, in this sense, the anatomy of *his* soul which we read and sing in the psalms.

When we speak about being “saved” by Christ’s work, we refer to our having received his humanity as our own – “putting on Christ” like a new garment, as Paul would have us visualise. To put on this Christ is to take upon ourselves *his* experience of God, his confidence and trust, and the obedience which that confidence and trust made possible. Jesus, then, stands before us as an example of one who could pray the prayer of our psalm, whose calm and quieted soul we see as he walks the roads of Judea, even the path to the cross.

It’s easy, of course, simply to say all of this! Perhaps the real question here is not *what* such a confidence and trust in God might be, but *how* it can be. That is, how does one *come* to trust as Jesus did? For surely it doesn’t help us into the poet’s experience simply to shift that experience to Jesus! It is easy to understand Jesus as an *example* of the uncomplicated faith the psalmists speaks of, but is there any sense in which Jesus actually makes such a faith *possible*?

There’s an easy answer here: Jesus makes this possible by simply showing that it can be done. But this doesn’t really help us. Jesus certainly is an *example*, but the whole onus for achieving trust in God is then thrust upon us. We find ourselves confronted with the sheer *effort* of trusting and resting in God. *y* itself this is extraordinarily hard work, for it is not really good news at all. The way to life is now through the personal effort and risk of trust, persistence and the earning God’s favour by our perseverance in waiting on the comfort God promises. In *Jesus as example*, the possibility of trusting God is somewhere out ahead of us, waiting for us to catch up. And we may well exhaust ourselves in the attempt.

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Yet, contrary to this *pursuit* of trust, the point of the gospel is that it is *Jesus* who makes the effort of trusting, so that we don’t have to. Perhaps the real question we want to ask is this: in what way might Jesus make the possibility of trust and confidence in God *concrete* and *tangible*?

To say that, of all candidates, *Jesus* is the one who sings the psalms, and so the one who truly trusts, and praises, and laments, is to have to say something comparable about those who are joined to him. It is as an embodied human being that *Jesus* demonstrates his trust and rest in the one who sent him. And it is in embodiment that such trust becomes possible for us today. The "body of Christ" – the *Church* – becomes the place in which it might be possible to see, touch, and experience the kind of trust and confidence the poet of our psalm speaks of. This is because the church is to be not simply a community of *trusting* souls, but also of *trustworthy* souls. It is trustworthiness which begets trust.

Growing in trust and confidence in God does require effort on our part, but it doesn't

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begin with our efforts on our *own* behalf. The work we do towards trust does not *earn* God's favour, but rather shows it forth, *models* it. That is, we grow each other's trust by being – ourselves – trustworthy. Whether we are conscious of it or not, "Show me *Jesus*" is the request which lies at the heart of all our reaching for each other, whether that reaching be erotic in intent, or simply a cry for friendship and companionship. "Show me *Jesus*" is what we ask when we wonder about the possibility of resting calmly with the psalmist in God's motherly arms.

And "*showing* *Jesus*" is the task of the people of God, individually and as a community. Trusting God requires not merely my wilful effort to trust but concrete trustworthiness in those around me. Calm setting aside of worry and anxiety, whether before God or before the world, calls for trustworthy and merciful promise keepers who have made real for us that we can rely on another for what we need, even if perhaps we don't deserve it. My capacity to grow in God requires growth with *you*, just as my growth in fellowship requires a greater devotion to God.

In calling us, then, to trust and hope in God, our poet calls us to grow in being trustworthy and to become as much a reason for hope as we are able. For it is in that work of love for each other that we discover that God really does take on the mantle of humanity, in order that our humanity may become the dwelling place of God, a place of confidence and hope.

Listen again to the psalmist's expression of

confidence in God:

² ...*I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is
with me.*

³ *O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.*

May God's Spirit so move among us that the faithful, trusting life of the Son who sings this psalm might be made real in us, to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**