

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Psalm 8 (OT page 546)
Acts 2:1-13 (NT page 1093)

I want to emphasize from the beginning that I picked two different texts from different times and different contexts one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. In Biblical scholarship and in general use of the Bible, you can never use or quote two different texts as if they have the same context, assuming that they mean the same thing. Each and every text must be interpreted in its own unique context and setting.

So I will explain each text.

In Psalm 8 the author begins and ends his Psalm in the same way. He uses the words "Lord our Lord" or in Hebrew "Jahweh" which was the covenant name for God and "Adonai" that was also used to address an earthly king. With these two titles he emphasizes the loving commitment of God and that all creation needs to obey Him like they would do for an earthly king.

In this Psalm the majesty of God comes not only from His Almighty displayed in His creation but also in His infinite grace by crowning humanity with His majesty.

The psalmist declares the greatness of God. No-one can ignore His majesty and power, even babies and children realizes this and sing about it. Even the enemies of God cannot do otherwise.

So the Psalmist confesses his own inability to understand why and how this great God, who have set everything in creation in its place, can bother about human beings? How can this Almighty God worry about sinful man? And he goes further saying that this God even trusted human beings with His masterpiece, creation.

Without coming to an answer, he concludes his Psalm with a confession namely that God is greater and His Being is mysteriously other than any human being. God acts in a totally different manner because He is God. It is only God who can be so gracious and loving to trust the human race.....

I guess the Psalmist drives two points home namely that we as humans must know our place and never play God over other people and secondly that we must never ever doubt the love that God has for each one of us.

So why did I decided to read this Psalm first. Well to ponder on this old, old question: what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

And this is the same question we must ask ourselves on this day as we celebrate the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. I mean don't you get Goosebumps when you read the text.

All the disciples were sitting in the same room presumably near the temple because that was the only neighborhood who had houses with big upper rooms. Jesus ascended to heaven. They must have felt so alone. All of them were Galileans. All of them spoke the same language with the same accents.

They were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the old Jewish feast of Pentecost, 50 days after Easter hence the name "Penta Costa". It was a festival of thanks for the harvest, which began directly after the Passover and was hence also called Day of the Firstfruits.

Jewish people from throughout the Roman and Parthian worlds would gather for the three main feasts namely the feasts of the Tabernacles, Passover and Pentecost. Because Pentecost was only fifty days after Passover, some who had spent much to make a rare pilgrimage to Jerusalem stayed between the two feasts. Pentecost was probably the least popular of the three pilgrimage festivals, but Josephus attests that it was nevertheless crowded.

And then God's wind from heaven blew over them and then tongues like fire separated and came to rest on each of them. God's Spirit was

outpoured and it resulted in each one of them speaking a different language from a different part of the world.

The Jews from Parthia would know Aramaic; those from the Roman Empire, Greek. But many of them would also be familiar with local languages spoken in outlying areas of their cities.

Then a crowd of people heard them speaking these different languages. They were amazed and asked each other: what does this mean?

To accuse a Jew of drunkenness, would have been a grievous insult.

The author wanted to emphasize two things:

God is so Almighty that He equipped the first disciples with the gifts of different languages to convey his message to the ends of earth.

Secondly that God was so gracious to help the human beings by giving them His Holy Spirit.

Sermon

I want to reflect on two questions namely: What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? And in Acts 2: “What does this mean?”

This week was a strange one in the sense that I found myself on two distinctly different journeys one day apart – one in a boat and the other in a bus.

On Wednesday I went with Nanda and some members of Presbytery on the annual day retreat to Inchcolm Island on a boat - off course. And then on Thursday I had to go into Edinburgh for a meeting. SO I TOOK a bus into the city.

It was only on Thursday that, on coming back from my meeting in Edinburgh that I realised the significance of both journeys especially in relation to the journey of faith.

The boat trip reminded me of how we sometimes find ourselves on choppy waters and stormy seas in a wee boat, which is life. And the only ONE who keeps us afloat is God through His Holy Spirit, guiding and helping us.

The bus trip reminded how vulnerable we are and the choices we face on a daily basis. God gave us choices. We can either climb off the bus which is life or we can stay on. And just like life there is different bus shelters. Some of them are in a good state of repair while others are in disrepair. Sometimes in life we do make the wrong choices and find ourselves in bother. And then we are faced once more with choices. We can remain in

bother - sitting in a “bus shelter” that is full of graffiti and not very rain tight. Or you can get out of that shelter and climb on the bus again.

I was also reminded on my bus trip how different each person is. Yes God created each and every person differently and unique. But I realised how each and every person has a different burden to bear. And by the looks of some - my o my some was really carrying a big burden.

It was then that the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 8 really struck a cord with me: “What is man then that you are mindful of him, human beings that you care for them?”

Psalm 8 goes on saying how God value human beings?

And to think this list continued long after this Psalm was written. In the New Testament God went through trials and tribulations, through pain and hell, through sacrifice and forgiveness, from despair to hope through Jesus Christ just to save humanity from sin and destruction.

And God did not stop here. Jesus was resurrected and destroyed the power of death just so that you and I can become citizens of heaven.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, God gave all the believers the gift of His Holy Spirit.

Each and every believer could from the start of the outpouring of His Spirit hear in their own mother tongues about His grace, love and mercy.

God included everyone from the start. He gave everyone a chance to hear His Gospel of grace, love and forgiveness.

You and I are forgiven by God. You and I are included in God's plan to inherit His Kingdom. You and I are important in God's eyes. You and I have never again have to doubt where God is. He is with us through His Holy Spirit.

We have seen the miracles of God in our own lifetime. We have seen doors that was closed, open again. We have seen people with frosty hearts return to worship God. We have seen broken people returning again and again to come into His presence here in Kirknewton and East Calder. We have witnessed the changes of attitude in our communities with regards to God and His church on earth. We can never say that God's Spirit is absent and not moving in this place. We can never ever deny the Almighty workings of God in our lives and in our communities.

Again and again we must remind ourselves of the words of Psalm 8: what is mankind that you are mindful of him... And every time we do think about these words we must sing joyous worship songs of praise to God, thanking him for His grace and mercy.

We are indeed on an exiting journey with God through His Holy Spirit. May we never ever loose our tickets of faith and may we never ever feel

deserted or alone, because we are not. God's Spirit is with each and everyone who shouts out: "O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" His Spirit is with us, Each and every time we confess that Jesus is Lord and each and every time we praise the Almighty God with words and deeds!

Amen