

“A Spring of Water”
Psalm 84
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
8.22.21
Sermon #111

For the music leader. According to the Gittith. Of the Korahites. A psalm.

84

How lovely is your dwelling place,
Lord of heavenly forces!

2

My very being longs, even yearns,
for the Lord's courtyards.

My heart and my body
will rejoice out loud to the living God!

3

Yes, the sparrow too has found a home there;
the swallow has found herself a nest

where she can lay her young beside your altars,
Lord of heavenly forces, my king, my God!

4

Those who live in your house are truly happy;
they praise you constantly. *Selah*

5

Those who put their strength in you are truly happy;
pilgrimage is in their hearts.

6

As they pass through the Baca Valley,
they make it a spring of water.
Yes, the early rain covers it with blessings.

7

They go from strength to strength,
until they see the supreme God in Zion.

8

Lord God of heavenly forces,

hear my prayer;

listen closely, Jacob's God! *Selah*

9

Look at our shield, God;

pay close attention to the face of your anointed
one!

10

Better is a single day in your courtyards

than a thousand days anywhere else!

I would prefer to stand outside the entrance of my God's
house

than live comfortably in the tents of the wicked!

11

The Lord is a sun and shield;

God is favor and glory.

The Lord gives—doesn't withhold!—good things
to those who walk with integrity.

12

Lord of heavenly forces,

those who trust in you are truly happy!

The word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The Book of Psalms is an interesting book. It's not solely attributed to one person. It's not a series of what we would consider stories. It's a book of prayers. Prayers that reflect the human condition: Sorrow, joy, anger, and doubt.

St. Athanasius noted that the Book of Psalms represents the entire human life. Martin Luther called the Psalter "the little Bible." John

Calvin said in his commentary on the Psalms “there is nothing wanting which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation.” Of course, for the longest time, Presbyterians only sang Psalms.

Psalm 84 falls near the end of *Book III* of Psalms, which includes Psalms 73-89. Psalm 73 opens up *Book III* wondering why the wicked prosper. Psalm 89 closes *Book III* with the demise of the Judean monarchy and it questions God’s fidelity regarding the covenant made through David. Yet, even as the psalmist questions God’s faithfulness, Psalm 89 begs God to remember the covenant made long ago.

Between the question in the opening psalm and the crisis presented in the closing psalm, throughout *Book III*, God is described as One who has been King since the beginning. God’s power destroys the agents of chaos and destruction. God

establishes order where none seem to exist. God is the God of the last and least of these and will protect the vulnerable so that God will continue to be praised by the people.

Psalm 84 happens just after Psalm 83, which is a Psalm of exhortation. That is, the psalmist is reminding God of God's past works that destroyed the enemies surrounding the people. Psalm 85 is a Psalm of Thanksgiving. The author praises God for changing the chosen people's circumstances for the better. While there is still a ways to go, times are certainly better for the descendants of Jacob.

Today's psalm celebrates God's temple as a dwelling place. And God's temple is unmatched. Everything else doesn't compare. And getting to God's temple is a journey. In verses five through seven, we read a vivid description of the journey to the temple. The

pilgrimage is in our hearts and for our ancient siblings listening to this psalm, it is also a physical journey. These spiritual and physical journeys take every ounce of strength that can't come from us, but from the supreme God of Zion. Also, the audience is reminded in verse ten that standing outside the entrance of God's house is better than living a comfortable life in the midst of the wicked. Better is a single day in God's courts than thousands elsewhere.

James Luther Mays says this in his commentary:

[Psalm 84] holds together yearning for God and the longing to be at a place because God has made it a place of Presence.¹

These two ideas are not separate. They are linked. We go to our places to worship whether they are in a building or outside, there is physical movement. Faith also takes movement. Faith is a journey.

¹ James Luther Mays. *Psalms*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994. p. 275.

It takes a lifetime to keep going, even if it is slower than a snail's pace! There is still movement.

There is still movement.

Physical movement can be something small as a change of posture or going to another room in order to pray. Movement can certainly be the Sunday morning ritual of getting to church. It's a process.

Faith undoubtedly takes movement. What a person holds to be true at one point in their life may get deconstructed later in life.

Possibly what someone never considered at one point in their life may become part of their core beliefs. Certainly as Presbyterians, we acknowledge that we are Reformed and always being Reformed according to the Word of God!

Obviously, movement is reflected in Presbyterian history.

Physically, we made the shift to no longer require ministers to be trained in Scotland when our country was expanding.

Theologically, we have made and continue to make the shift such as the Confession of 1967, the Brief Statement of Faith following the reunification of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian branches, and the Confession of Belhar. In both the physical and theological movements, the Spirit pushed us to realize that there is more than we thought possible.

A couple of years ago, I was talking with some Ruling Elders in another congregation about their being nominated to serve again on the Session. The question was asked, "Do we need to be examined even though we have already been ordained and served?" I responded as firmly and as pastorally as I could without losing my temper, "YES! If you haven't grown in your faith since

you last served on the Session, then you need to find something else to do because we don't have time for that mess! Not only is it prescribed in the *Book of Order*, but if your faith hasn't moved in years, then you need to seriously re-examine your relationship with Christ."

In our lives, we are constantly moving. We move physically and we move spiritually. If we aren't moving, then something is up. The movement doesn't have to be at a certain pace, but with movement, growth can occur in some way. The movement doesn't happen because of what we do, it is the Spirit's movement in our lives. That gut feeling, the fist in the small of your back, the unsettledness, or however you feel the Spirit, that's movement.

In our lives, as we move toward God, like it says in Psalm 84, where we yearn to be in God's house, we don't just do it because

it's tradition. We go because it's a spiritual matter. No, I'm not talking about the actual buildings where congregations gather, though that can be part of it. I'm talking about the journey itself. I'm talking about the pilgrimage that each of us are on in our own way at our own speeds that leads us through the green pastures, the valleys of the shadow of death, the still waters, the wildernesses, and the refreshing springs that come from the unlikeliest of places. It is that journey that ultimately leads us into the courts of our God who is our Sun and Shield who provides our every need who has been with us every step of the way.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.