

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Barbara Lohrbach
October 2, 2011

Drink Deeply: Receiving

Series: *Practicing the Presence of God*

Psalm 19 A paraphrase by Nan C. Merrill from “Praying the Psalms”

Practice, a verb meaning to live out...to apply...to follow the presence of God. Our journey continues as we practice the presence of God not only in worship, but in our day-to-day living. God’s presence is always with us. The things we explored in September reminded us to be aware of that promise. The affirmations from September’s “Live Simply” are on the narthex table. I can also email it if you were unable to be in worship.

In October, we will play with the phrase, “drink deeply”—drink deeply of life. Think of the power of thirst and how refreshing it is to drink a glass of cold water when we are thirsty. The first time I remember hearing this phrase it was a colleague at work whose words to me as I left for the day were: “Drink heavily.” It took me a while to figure out that he meant “drink heavily of life”—not go home and drink too much wine.

It was a prayer, “Drink Deeply” that helped me to better understand what my colleague meant. *God, I want to drink deeply. But I am hesitant because to drink deeply means you will be fully in my life, and I like my life. I have a good routine going – including a daily devotion! But I have dreams and ideas of my own and I am afraid you will call me to go somewhere out of my routine. But today, I will sip. And tomorrow I will sip again, and I will trust you to gradually fill me and move me to do your work in the world. Amen.*

But today—I will sip. Life seems to be best understood in being present to the moment. *But today—I will sip.* There are no guarantees that we have more than this day, even this moment. *But today—I will sip.*

The Psalms are the expressions of people, like us, who struggled to make sense of their lives. The poetry expresses the honesty of people who were not afraid to tell God what they thought. At times the Psalms are filled with anguish and sorrow and at other times with great joy and confidence that somehow God has control of life. The words of Psalm 19 express that confidence. I am using a paraphrase by Nan Merrill in her book, “Praying the Psalms.” She uses the word love with a capital L as the word for God.

*The heavens declare the glory of the Creator;
The firmament proclaims the handiwork of Love.
Day to day speech pours forth and night to night knowledge is revealed.
There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
Yet does their music go out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.
In them a tent for the sun is set, which is like two lovers on their wedding night
as they sing love’s song and celebrate the dance of life.
Its rising is in eternity, and its circuit to infinity; there is nothing hid from the sunlight.*

*The law of Love is perfect, reviving the soul;
The testimony of Love is sure, making wise the simple;
The precepts of Love are right, rejoicing the heart;
The authority of love is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The spirit of Love is wondrous, enduring forever;*

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*The rites of Love are true, awakening compassion.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover by them are the loving alerted; in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern their own weaknesses?
Cleanse me, O Love, from all my hidden faults.
Keep me from boldly acting in error; let my fears not have dominion over me!
Then shall I become a beneficial presence, freely and fully surrendered to your Love.*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart find favor in your heart,
O my Beloved, My strength and my joy!*

The writer of this Psalm saw God expressed in the world around him—the heavens and the firmament. His testimony is that God is known not only through the words of human expression, but even more so through the creation. He seems to recognize that he is but a small part of creation and yet he matters to the Creator. I imagine he stood in the black ink of night watching the twinkling lights of stars and planets and then watching as the night gave way to the rising of the sun. He sipped the glory of the God even beyond his knowing. The psalmist was receiving.

As a pastor people ask me many questions about this God stuff. One common question is about their purpose in this life. Sometimes their purpose seems clear and at other times, it is an effort. That sense of purpose often becomes more difficult in times of illness or when we are touched by the death of loved one or especially as we grow older. “Pastor—why am I still here? Why doesn’t God let me die?”

We live in a culture that values our work, our success, our contributions. God wants us to experience those things in life, but that is not what God values. God values us—each individual who by their presence makes the world a more beautiful place. Our purpose in God’s eyes is not what we contribute or what we do, but in receiving the gifts that God places before us. Receiving all that each day has to offer—the food we eat, the people who love us, and the reminders of life’s goodness. Before we can ever give anything, we receive. We receive the gift of life, our very breath—a gift that can only be received. So when we struggle to wonder why we are here—stop and sip...stop and receive...stop and drink deeply of life.

Receive the grace and love of the one who created the heavens and earth. Receive the promise of God’s presence that never leaves us nor forsakes us. Today we celebrate in the Christian faith the most tangible sacrament of receiving. Take this bread and take this cup—receive the gifts of God in the sip of juice and piece of bread. Sip and know that at this table you are welcome. Sip and go forth to practice the presence of God—here is this sanctuary and in the sanctuary of the world. Every encounter is an opportunity to sip—to drink deeply of God’s presence and of life.

Affirmation:

Each day I will sip of life and drink in the presence of God through my relationships, my work and my play.