

Message, 19 January, 2014
Part 3 of The Bible Jesus Read.

Pray

We are surveying the Old Testament during Epiphany Season. Part 1 sermon in a sentence: In our struggle to understand the Bible, we find not less, but more astonishment in the Old Testament, which is the only Bible Jesus read, whose purpose points toward reality and grace.



Part 2 sermon in a sentence: Just as a Hooked on the 80's songbook has multiple song composers, the Psalms are like a prayer journal by several writers, handed down to us, inspiring us when we're stuck, lifting our spirits with the power of poetry; a spirituality in every key of life.

Here we are in Part 3, Ecclesiastes, not any easy name to pronounce and I don't think a lot of sermons get preached on this book of Ecclesiastes. It's in the middle of the bible, just after Psalms and Proverbs, but couldn't be more different than the book of Proverbs with all its pithy wisdom, about life, and not sitting in the seat of mockers, nor hanging out with evil doers, but hanging out with God.

Do you know the first word of Ecclesiastes? Meaningless! Meaningless! Says the teacher, Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless. Now there's a contemporary matter indeed. In the news this week, Stratford's own singing sensation, Justin Bieber, one of the worlds' best known pop stars and mega-millionaire, had the LA police visit his mansion in Los Angeles this week because a neighbour complained Justin had been yelling obscenities and throwing eggs at his house.

Eccl. means teacher of the church. The teacher, quohemoth in the Hebrew is not named. Some believe it was King Solomon, who asked God for wisdom and God gave him wisdom, and power and wealth. In any case, the writer, teacher, preacher of Ecclesiastes is not only a voice from the Old Testament worth hearing then but it couldn't be more contemporary. Listen to the

first words of the Ecclesiastes, "Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher, Utterly meaningless." Now there's a winning opening line!

And it

I felt I was missing out. I wanted to experience things as a young man. I was mostly comfortable and sometimes bored. I knew right from wrong but the wrong seemed, right. While I have not pursued anywhere near the extent of wildness and unbridled ambition of the writer of Ecclesiastes, I can relate.

Message Notes:

Ecclesiastes, means Teacher of the Church (Ecclesia means gathering or church). Some believe the author was King Solomon, though his name is not mentioned.

Key Words: Meaningless. Nothing new "under the sun" (30 times).

Key Theme: the significance of human life; wealth, power, pleasure, wisdom - all are meaningless, yet in Chapter 12 is the conclusion of it all: "Fear God and keep his commandments." What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it over the next two weeks?

Song those were the days my friends

Reads like a pol

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

The Four Calls

The Spirit came *in childhood* and pleaded, "Let me in,"□But oh! the door was bolted by thoughtlessness and sin;□"I am too young," the child replied, "I will not yield today;□There's time enough tomorrow." The Spirit went away.

Again He came and pleaded *in youth's* bright happy hour;□He came but heard no answer, for lured by Satan's power□The youth lay dreaming then and saying, "Not today,□Not till I've tried earth's pleasures." The Spirit went away.

Again He called in mercy *in manhood's vigorous* prime, □ But still He found no welcome, the merchant had no time; □ No time for true repentance, no time to think or pray, □ And so, repulsed and saddened, the Spirit went away.

Once more He called and waited, *the man was old* and ill, □ And scarcely heard the whisper, his heart was cold and still; □ “Go leave me; when I need thee, I’ll call for thee,” he cried; □ Then sinking on his pillow, without a hope, he died! itical biography

For those who were here last Sunday, how did you do with my challenge? Did you read Ecclesiastes chapter 3, verses 1 to 12 before coming to Church?

Ecclesiastes (n.)

c.1300, name given to one of the Old Testament books, traditionally ascribed to Solomon, from Greek *ekklesiastes* - Hebrew *qohelah* "one who addresses an assembly," from *qahal* "assembly." The title is technically the designation of the speaker.

The Psalms. Not any less inspired than the Gospels or Paul’s letters. There they are, right in the middle of the bible! I have not always liked or read the psalms because poetry I felt was confusing – not like straight-forward stories about David and Goliath or Jesus as a twelve year old getting lost in the temple! But as I have grown older I have come to deeply appreciate the spirituality of the psalms, a spirituality in every key of life’s ups and downs.

I have learned that not all the Psalms were written by King David, like Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd. David’s name appears on 73 of the 150 psalms; there Psalms (songs!) by Solomon, Asaph, Sons of Korah and others. The Psalms are personal prayers in the form of poetry, written by a variety of people – peasants, kings, professional musicians, rank amateurs, in wildly fluctuating moods.

The OT books Job and Deuteronomy offer the extraordinary cases of two renowned, righteous men trying to relate to God through difficult times. The Psalms give examples of ordinary people struggling mightily to align what they believe about God with what they actually experience.

Sometimes the psalm writers are vindictive, sometimes self-righteous, sometimes paranoid, sometimes petty.

I have learned there are 5 types of psalms: Praise or Thank-offering Psalms, Psalms of Lament both personal and corporate, enthronement psalms and problem psalms.

The composition of the psalms spans at least five centuries. The majority of the Psalms originated in the southern [kingdom of Judah](#) and were associated with the Temple in Jerusalem, where they probably functioned as [libretto](#) or song book during the Temple worship. David is depicted as a righteous king, although not without faults, as well as an acclaimed warrior, musician, and poet, the one who soothed Saul with music, (1 Samuel 16:17–23), and the founded Temple singing praises, Psalms 145-150 (2 Chronicles 23:18 and Nehemiah 12:24,36, 45–46); Psalms of lament like we hear in Holy Week when Jesus cries out from the cross Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Problem psalms plumb the depths of rage and revenge, such as Psalm 137, not pretty, yet reflective of human experience then and now.

Of these 5 types of Psalms which type do you think is Psalm 29? If you said, ‘enthronement’ you’d be correct. Psalm 29 is adapted from early Canaanite worship, people who worshipped gods under every rock and tree. Psalm 29 is ascribing or attributing to the one true God, the creator, power, strength, authority, liberating God’s people from the oppression of the plethora of idols of the surrounding culture.

Why have the Revised Common Lectionary compilers chosen Psalm 29, an enthronement Psalm, on the Baptism of the Lord Sunday?

Anyone who has tried to get a teenager up for church on a Sunday morning knows that faith can be a battleground!

King David, the warrior, poet, politician, lost the battle of his eyes – when he saw Bathsheba bathing - which opened the door for him to lose the battle of his heart – by acting on his temptation and committing adultery - and the lost battle was all because he was not in the battle we was born for.

Everybody's being born for battle. Yes, there are OT battle between nations, which are prophetic pictures of spiritual conflict. We were meant for triumph, for victory, for taking territory, for people to be impacted by our lives, areas of negativity over a city to be broken because of how we do life, and keep our baptismal promises.

Every body's been born for triumph and victory in God. When we turn away from the battle we are assigned for, we lose the battle we not equipped for; that there would be a shift in the atmosphere of a neighbourhood; that there would be shift in atmosphere of a business or industry; that there would be righteous influence in government.

But when we lose track of what we're born for, we get subjected to stuff we're not ready for.

In the losing locker room I want to hear players praising the Lord. You and I were designed to be a living, worshipping instrument; our personality, senses, smell, sight, hearing, touch, were designed to recognize God.

As in the book of Hebrews chapter 5, having your senses trained to discern the Lord, worship is a part of our church culture. Singing to the Lord, is not a foreign experience any longer. Anyone, teenager or not, can tell when love is authentic, when the experience of God's presence is real. The battle for attending church is won or lost before you come. It's in the mind, the spirit, the attitude, the expectancy for God the Creator and Saviour to show up and do his thing.

Poetry works its magic subtly. In modern times, we rarely seek out poetry for didactic (learning) purposes, to learn something. We turn to poetry because the poet's skillful shaping of words (Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah, "it's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah") If a poet succeeds, we may gain something greater than knowledge: a transformed vision.

When you read the Rhyme Bible for you children or grandchildren for example, you're reading a simple rhyme yet the familiar story has a beat, a feel to it that is infectious. Michael Jackson in his song "Beat it" didn't put that lyric and music in there for nothing. It was to create a mood, a memory jogger. That's all I remember of the song, but I do remember that. The Psalms are like that. Today in Psalm 29, 'the Voice of the Lord,' is repeated, count 'em, 7 times! Sounds like a chorus or refrain he wanted you to

remember!

A singer from rock group U2 and social justice advocate **Bono** said, “I accept the Old Testament as more of an action movie: blood, car chases, evacuations, a lot of special effects, seas dividing, mass murder, adultery. The children of God are running amok, wayward. Maybe that's why they're so relatable.”

Even without music, the musicality of this psalm, underscored by the poetic technique of repetition throughout, helps us hear the psalm's main theme: God's glory and majesty are unmatched on earth or in the heavens. We human beings, along with the universe in its entirety, are subjects of the sovereign Lord.

Just as Jesus heard the voice from heaven, the voice, through that same Spirit living in the newly baptized and in us, allows us to hear from heaven ourselves. Can you hear that whisper? “You are my beloved. With you I am well pleased!” Enthroned on our hearts is our king Jesus, strong, gentle, patient, wise.

So, what is God saying TO YOU? Not filtered through some other source, but to you? That’s why I am giving you this opportunity, this challenge, so that you might take the few moments each week and read the bible reading ahead of church and come prepared and begin to discern GOD SPEAKING TO YOU, through his word and spirit. He loves you. You can do all the talking, but we need to take a few moments to sit and listen and perhaps repeat the words of the bible slowly in a prayer back to God, and things just might get clearer. Don’t give up!

We are blessed today to have three little spokespersons for God right here, giving witness in word and deed to their baptism in Christ: Ella Callery, age 3, whom I baptized two years ago, whose little sister I baptized today. Ella reminds Mommy and Daddy to pray, before eating, not just at dinner but before every meal! “Let’s hold hands and pray,” she says.

Then there’s Ella’s brother Jakob, whom I baptized two years ago, who says “happy, happy, happy!” all the time!

Then there's Jennifer, Sierra's Mom (Sierra, the five year old in the beautiful white dress whom I just baptized and who walked all way around St. John's holding hands with me!) who sponsors not one but two children through World Vision. She loves receiving cards, drawings, and letters in translation, from her sponsor children.

May the Lord who thinks of us as his beloved (sponsor!) children, speak to our hearts and minds. Amen.

Pray

We ascribe to you Lord greatness and glory. May we be open to your astonishing word as we continue to read the Bible Jesus Read. Alleluia. Amen.