

**Being Still. Being Thankful.**

Psalm 46      *“Be still, and know that I am God!  
I am exalted among the nations.  
I am exalted in the earth.”*

Colossians 1:11-20      *...may you be prepared to endure everything  
with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to God the Father....*

Be Still and Know That I Am God

There is a Zen Buddhist story about a man on a horse that is galloping wildly down the road. A man standing on the roadside shouts to the horseman as he races by: “Where are you going?” The other shouts back: “Don’t ask me! Ask the horse!”

I think that story describes our own lives and the spiritual work that is always before us. We race around here and there, physically, mentally, spiritually. We are like the man on the horse being carried this way and that, feeling out of control, uncentered and unsatisfied.

Zen’s answer is simple: We need to practice stopping and calming. We can stop the horse if we practice being quiet, if we just sit and breathe, entering the present moment, allowing our inner life to settle down. It is not as easy as it sounds. But we can do it if we practice.

Psalm 46 has the same message for us. It is a poem of God’s majesty and rule over all creation, human and non-human life. Nations, including our own, are lost in war-making, are ego-centered and causing damage to humans and the creation itself. The psalm says that God is above all of this. Not in the sense of not caring or being unconcerned, but having other purposes for us and for life. God is the maker of peace, the one who is working to end wars, to destroy the weapons of war. That is who God is. That is what God is doing. Therefore, that is where we are supposed to be.

How do we do that? How do we ground our lives in God and what God is doing? First we stop. “Be still, and know that I am God.” This is quitting our fighting, our conflicts, inward and outward. This is stopping and calming ourselves at the center of our being. It is the first step in prayer and in the spiritual life. It comes before our actions

and words. It is the inward work we must do if we are offer ourselves as channels of God's peace, justice and compassion, as those who are filled with God.

This community has always valued stopping and calming, this being still so that we can know that God is God. We call it the contemplative life, a regular, constant quieting our inner life so that we harmonize ourselves with God's presence and movements. Yet I think that we still have a ways to go in this. To value something doesn't mean that we are faithfully and fully doing it. Practicing this "being still" is an ongoing challenge. When our lives are going well and we are in good spirits, we forget to be still and know that God is God. We think we don't need it. We're doing okay. When our lives are in turmoil or we feel pressure and stress, we avoid "being still." We are too anxious. We are full of fear or despondency, and we resist becoming quiet enough to embrace what we are feeling and to let God speak to us about it.

One thing is sure. If we are sensitive to the needs of our world and of people, and if we are overcome with anxiousness, anger, or despondency about it, then we can offer nothing to the world or to other people to make it better. But when we are practicing "being still," stopping and calming, we open up our own inner life to God, thus to hope, energy, and most importantly love.

This is something we can do at any time. Most important is a daily time of extended prayer and meditation. But we can be still any time and anywhere. As we are driving the car. As we are sitting at our desk. As we eat our lunch or drink our cup of coffee. At any moment, in any place, we can practice being still and know that God is God. Even in the most difficult of situations we can touch the deep knowledge that all of life is enveloped in God's mysterious yet sure care and keeping. We can be on our horse and know where we are going.

#### Patience, Thanksgiving, Joy

In the reading from Colossians, Paul prays for the community to "be made strong through the strength that comes from God's glorious power." This echoes the psalm. We can draw inner strength from this intimate and real knowledge of God's dominion over all creation, beginning with our own lives. It is the strength of knowing that God has the final word, that what God is working for is what will

really last, not the messes and turmoils that beset us as individuals or a human family. We have a connection with that power and can live out of it. This gives us the kind of strength Paul is talking about.

Because this is so, Paul prays that we be prepared to endure everything with patience. This is more than just “putting up with” things. It is a profound acceptance of every situation so that we are ready to perceive within it what God is teaching us and what God is doing in every circumstance regardless of how hopeless it seems.

Further, Paul calls us to endure in a spirit of joyful thanksgiving. This joy is deeper than what we usually think of as happiness. It does not depend upon how things are going at the moment. This joy embraces the pain, hurt, or fear that we may feel, does not push it away or run from it. This kind of joy also embraces the beauty, goodness, and pleasures of life. It accepts both the garbage and the flowers of our lives, knowing that both are part of life. With this kind of joy we can touch a deeper thankfulness that does not depend on things going well. It is thankfulness that God is God and is present in all things and whose love envelops all things.

The strength, patience, joy, and thanksgiving that Paul wants for us are also related to our being still, our capacity to stop and to calm. It all arises as we draw from the well of our relationship with God, our connectedness to God. When we are people who can be still and know that God is God, we open up that well, we touch that connection, that relationship. God truly becomes our refuge and strength. This refuge is not a running away from life but an entering into the sanctuary of life where we touch what is really real. In that refuge we can embrace the total reality of our lives. We can acknowledge our fears, feelings of failure, our hurt or anger without dwelling on them, without their consuming us. For we can also acknowledge what is healthy, good, and beautiful in us and around us. In all of this, we grow in our spiritual capacity for that deeper kind of joy and thanksgiving.

### Christ the Center

How can we really do this? By remembering that it all does not depend on our efforts alone. Paul reminds us that something has already happened to us that makes it all possible. It is the presence and action of God in Christ. *God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. I*

think Paul has in mind a more organic image that this translation offers. God has uprooted us from the soil of despair and transplanted us in the good soil of the kingdom of Christ. This is Paul's baptismal language. When we confess our faith in Christ and are baptized, it is not something we do but something God does for us. Paul took baptism very seriously. It wasn't just a decision we made or someone made for us when we were infants. It was God's transplanting us into a completely new reality, a life rooted in God through Christ.

Now Paul talks about who Christ is and why being rooted in him means that everything has changed for us. He uses what scholars believe is an early hymn of the church. Paul knows that speaking about who Christ is and what he means for us and the world is best expressed in poetry. Christ, the image of the invisible God. The firstborn of all creation. The one in and through whom all things were created and hold together. The head of the body of believers, the church. The firstborn from the dead who has first place in all things. The one in whom the fullness of God lived so that we might have that same fullness. The one in whom God has reconciled himself to everything and everyone, in whom God has made peace with the world through the suffering and death of Christ. We should simply let these images wash over us rather than try to explain them. These images speak to our souls, our spirits of the mystery and grace of the new life we have in Christ. What we seek, what we so much want—an unshakable communion with God—we already have as a gift in the life, death, and in the living Christ in whom we now live. Our spiritual work is to receive that gift and live out of it every moment and day of our lives.

Today is the last Sunday of the Christian liturgical year. It has been called Christ the King Sunday, or the Reign of Christ. It is a reminder of the Good News that in Christ God's kingdom, God's reign has dawned and is moving toward fulfillment. This new life that God desires for the world and for us seeks to be born and to grow in us. This is what we are about as a community of faith--awakening to God, to what God is doing and wants to do for the whole world, and making ourselves part of it. Our readings this morning point the direction. Stop. Be still. Know that God is God. Let patience, thanksgiving, and joy become the core of your own life. Center your life in Christ, in whom the fullness of God lived so that same fullness lives in you.