

“The Day the Lord Has Made”

Scripture: Psalm 118:19-20

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OAKLAND AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 10/14/2007

Psalm 118:19-29

- ¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.
²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.
²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
²³ This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
²⁴ This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
²⁵ Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!
O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!
²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
²⁷ The LORD is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.
²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.
²⁹ O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

There are too many words that I would like to say today but the most important word is “thanks.” Thanks to God for the days we have shared together. And thanks to this congregation for the opportunity to serve together. I find that I am humming that line from the song, “My Way” where Frank Sinatra sang, “Regrets...I had a few; but then again, too few to mention.”

That’s an intriguing song...to lead life doing it “my way.” My deepest regrets have been when I have confused my way with God’s way...and so each Sunday, I still need to pray, “I have left undone those things that I ought to have done and done those things that I ought not to have done.” It keeps coming back to God’s way. And I find that it is God’s way in the heart of the heart of our Scripture this morning. Or, more specifically, it is God’s day. “This is day that Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

One of my personal fascinations is with language and forms of expressions...and this text has fascinating twists in it. Grammatically speaking, there is a pronoun in the original Hebrew that does

not have a clear antecedent. Now before you shiver about getting a grammar lesson, stay with me on this one. This text can legitimately be translated as “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”—that is, the day. The Hebrew here has a masculine pronoun and the word “day” is a masculine gender noun, so the antecedent for the pronoun is day. Each day is gift from God. We are to be glad in it. We can enjoy God’s gift of time.

However, this masculine gender pronoun might have a different antecedent and thus a different translation: “This is day that Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in him”—not in some “it” but in “him,” that is, in God. God is the antecedent. Let us celebrate our relationship with God who moves in and among us. Our gladness is not just in God’s gift of time but in the very being of God.

Which is the preferred translation? In some ways, it is like my answer to the question, “Would you like pecan pie or lemon pie?” My answer is, “Yes.” So here’s my take on the translation question: both work. There are some days that are so grand that I am glad to be alive. Time is a gift. I can sing, “Zipidee do-dah, zipidee-de-ay—My, oh my, what a wonderful day!” Then there are days where I may have a hard time finding something for which to rejoice and be glad. However, there is still the possibility...no, the absolute certainty...that I can be glad in God. In all things, the apostle Paul, would say, “Be thankful.” Thankful in God...not just when you had a “nice day.”

Today, of course, is a day of completion...of finishing the formal and official relationship of an installed pastor of Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church. There is sadness and regret in this day for me...there is thanksgiving and gratefulness in this day in the Lord for what has been. For this is God’s day...not my day...not yours.

So, in many ways, it is very appropriate that Carlisle Holler, chair of the Stewardship Campaign, Gary Brannan, and others met you this morning with your pledge card for 2008. Of all things, I am to preach about stewardship on my last Sunday with you! I get to do the “Sermon on the Amount!” But this is not my day...it is not your day...it is God’s day. Stewardship of our lives—time, talent, and resources—is always about remembering that each day is God’s good creation...God’s good making. We don’t own the day...we don’t rent the day...we are trustees of the day or stewards of the day.

In some ways it would be much easier if God just rented us each day: a renter is not a steward. A renter pays the rent for the provision of certain goods, certain rights, certain usages, and then does what one pleases. God does not treat us like renters...God gives us the day, each day. God chooses to trust us with what we call “my time,” but all is a gift...to trust us with “my life” but all is a gift...to trust us with “my choice” but all is a gift.

Now it is easy to turn stewardship in to rent...into what we owe God. One of the saddest commentaries on the human condition is the tendency to become more self-serving, the better-off we become. Prosperity makes us stingy. I think, for example, of each participant that I have known who has been a part of our Central American mission efforts—they come back astounded at the generosity of those who have so little. They wonder: How can people who have so little be so open, glad, and generous? And then, statistically speaking, the better-off we become as Americans, the less generous we are with our resources. For example, church giving was proportionately higher

during the Great Depression than it is today. We do not seem to handle affluence very well. But stewardship is not rent...not about paying what you and I clearly owe. Stewardship is the acknowledgement that this is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in the day...let us rejoice and be glad in God. And what you put on the pledge card is one sign of your stewardship.

Now as most of you realize, Christian faith is more caught than taught. Faith is infectious: we are around people who have something that inspires us, challenges us, makes us want to have something similar...the faith is caught more than taught. I know I learned stewardship by watching others practice it. Indeed, I caught a part of my Christian faith from the Franklins: Mr. and Mrs. Franklin who sat in front of us every Sunday in worship. They sang the hymns; they knew people in the congregation; they were there Sunday after Sunday; they knew my name as a child; they always seemed about to laugh with joy at something. What I found out as an adult is that early on the Franklins had started a tradition as a couple. Each morning, they had a sort of contest to be the first one to say out loud: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in him." Every day they would speak these words...and it showed in the rest of their lives.

I have no parting warnings or parting commands for Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church. I simply want to give witness to my gratefulness for how God has moved among us these past 18 years...for the more than 6600 days. And I want to say out aloud my testimony: Each day has been a day the Lord has made. So let us rejoice and be glad in it...let us rejoice and be glad in him. Thanks be to God.

As I lead you now in prayer, I will use a prayer of one of my favorite wordsmiths of praise to God, Ted Loder. I almost changed each of the pronouns from “I, me, my” to “we, us, our,” but I decided to leave the prayer as is. I invite you to hear these pronouns as your prayer as well as mine.

“I Praise You for What Is Yet to Be”¹

Wondrous Worker of Wonders,
I praise you
not alone for what has been,
 or for what is,
 but for what is yet to be,
for you are gracious beyond all telling of it.

I praise you
that out of the turbulence of my life
 a kingdom is coming,
 is being shaped even now
 out of my slivers of loving,
 my bits of trusting,
 my sprigs of hoping,
 my tootles of laughing,
 my drips of crying,
 my smidgens of worshipping;
that out of my songs and struggles,
 out of my griefs and triumphs,
 I am gathered up and saved,
For you are gracious beyond all telling of it.

I praise you
that you turn me loose
 to go with you to the edge of now and
maybe,
 to welcome the new,
 to see my possibilities,
 to accept my limits,
and yet begin living to the limit
 of passion and compassion
 until,
 released by joy,
I uncurl [and open] to other people
 and to your kingdom coming,
for you are gracious beyond all telling of it.

[Tag repeat]
Wondrous Worker of Wonders,
I praise you
not alone for what has been,
 or for what is,
 but for what is yet to be,
for you are gracious beyond all telling of it.

1 Ted Loder, *Guerillas of Grace*, page 36; adapted