

## Psalm Seminar at Whatcoat UMC – Saturday, March 4, 2017

Returning to the midst of God's Word: Lord, teach us to sing our prayers

30 minutes – Intro – What brings you here and what is your experience with the Psalms?

My intro: A six-year obsession with the Psalms began as a desire to incorporate Psalms into our regular worship at Skyline UMC, then blossomed at Asbury UMC as I read John D. Witvliet's *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* and through his work, discovered the contemporary Psalter, *Psalms for All Seasons*, which we used in worship every Sunday at Asbury UMC from 2011-2015 (they still use it).

This blossomed into a life-transforming personal devotional experience with praying and singing the Psalms, which became for me a kind of portal of adoration and praise as I gathered a collection of over 1000 Psalm musical settings and explored new way to pray and sing the Psalms: with drawing, movement, dance, and memorization (of the Marian Psalter). Increasingly, I felt isolated in this relentless pursuit and unable to communicate to others my experience of God's presence in the Psalms.

In 2016, I began praying/singing the Psalms daily, using the Anglican monthly cycle of praying all of the Psalter, morning and night. It dawned on me that this Pilgrimage involved many people and groups of Christians in a spiritual renaissance of Psalm singing and praying that God had invited me to join. God is raising up dedicated musicians all over the world: Karl Kohlhasse in Minnesota, Esther Mui in China, Scott Brenner in South Korea, The Psalm Project in the Netherlands, and the Sons of Korah in Australia – to name but a few.

This retreat and this Lenten worship series at Whatcoat UMC, "One Faith: Praying the Psalms of Our Salvation," as well as a worship project for young adults on March 24, called "Psalm Rave" are my attempts to be faithful to God's calling to share this passion with others – to return to the roots of this Psalm prayer and song calling – the worship life of the Church.

**Psalm Tour with Singing: Five Books and Movement** – Psalm 1-2 introduce the Psalter (wisdom/righteousness and kingship/conflict). *Sing Psalm 1 – Happy is the One (Bell – 1F); listen to Handel's version of Psalm 2:2 from The Messiah.*

Hermann Gunkel, in 1926, categorized Psalms by genre – and many others followed. Psalms are predominantly Laments, though genre classification is more art than science, since all but one of the Laments give way to praise. I'll note the Gunkel categories as we sing through the Psalter today. Gunkel had four major categories of psalms: (1) Hymns; (2) Communal Laments; (3) Royal Psalms; (4) Individual Laments—he also recognized minor categories: Songs of Pilgrimage, Communal Songs of Thanksgiving, Wisdom Poetry, Liturgical Psalms, and Mixed.

Torah/Pentateuch comparison – each book ends with a doxology, at the end of the last Psalm in the book (eg., Psalm 41:13 "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,/ from everlasting to everlasting./ Amen and Amen.") Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern scholars have increasingly come to appreciate the interpretive value of the context of the Psalm in the Psalter (adjacent Psalms can illuminate each other), called a **canonical** approach.

Walter Brueggemann, in *Praying the Psalms*, suggests a three-fold movement: **Orientation**, which, like Proverbs, celebrate a divine order of life - typically the way things are – that is right, just, and good (1, 8, 14, 37, 104, 119, 145); **Disorientation**, which desperately cling to faith amidst the chaos and brokenness of a life which seems God has abandoned (13, 22, 51, 88, 137); **Sing Psalm 13 – *How Long, O Lord* (Brian Doerksen – 13C) to 3:30 – an Individual Lament**; and **Reorientation**, which give thanks for the surprising resurrection life God makes possible (23, 27, 30, 65, 91, 100, 138, 150). Notice juxtapositions in the collection: 13-14; 22-23; 137-138.

1. **Book I (1-41)** – all except 1-2, 10, and 33 attributed to David (73 Psalms are attributed to David). May have been the first collection of Psalms. After 1-2, the collection begins with several laments (3-7 and 9-10). Psalms 9-10 are one Psalm in the Septuagint/Vulgate, and begin the discrepancy between Protestant/Hebrew and Catholic Psalm numbering (see below). YHWH outnumbers Elohim 272 to 15 in this opening book. **Sing Psalm 23 – Metrical #136 (CM, 86.86, *Amazing Grace, 1000 Tongues*) – a Lament of Trust**. Once you have a metrical translation (this is the hard part), you can easily find a tune the congregation knows. **Sing Psalm 32 – Responsorial (*You Are my Hiding Place* - #766, using 32B tone). Verbally accurate and easily learned, but not matched emotionally – a Psalm of Thanksgiving.**
2. **Book II (42-72)** – Opens the “Elohistic Psalter” (through Asaph Psalms – 83 – probably post-exilic, in which Elohim outnumbers YHWH 200 to 43). Begins with collection attributed to “The Sons of Korah” (42-49 – see also 84, 85, 87) and a series called the “Fugitive” Psalms (52-60) that follow the Psalm 51, which is David’s confession. **Sing Psalm 72 *Hail to the Lord’s Anointed* #203 – a Royal Psalm**. Psalm 72 ends with: “The prayers (*tephillah*) of David son of Jesse are ended” and may have been the end of an earlier collection of Psalms. Psalm 14 and 53 are nearly identical (so may have been part of originally separate collections).
3. **Book III (73-89)** – The first of the two shortest Psalm books (III and IV) - begins with a collection attributed to Asaph (73-83, and also 50), and ends with Psalm 88, a lament with no praise, and Psalm 89, which mutes its praise, and so forms the low point (exile, end of Davidic monarchy) of the Psalter. **Sing *Taize Within Our Darkest Night* (88A) – Lament**
4. **Book IV (90-106)** – Begins with Psalm 90, the superscript of which attributes this Psalm to Moses, “turning the spotlight from the Davidic dynasty to the Mosaic covenant” (Daly-Denton). Includes a collection called the “Enthronement” Psalms (93-100), perhaps older liturgical and coronation Psalms reconceived as a new messianic covenant. **Sing Psalm 95: scripture song, *Come Let Us Worship and Bow Down* – a Liturgical Psalm. (Sing my Psalm 95 arrangement?). Also mention *On Eagles Wings* (Psalm 91) and *Joy to the World* (Psalm 98).**
5. **Book V (107-150)** – Includes three collections: The six Egyptian Hallel (Passover) Psalms (113-118) **sing *This is the Day* (118K:19, 24, 28) – a Psalm of Thanksgiving**, which Jesus and the disciples most likely sang after the last supper (see Mark 14:26); the 15 Psalms of Ascents (pilgrimage and the Feast of Booths – 120-134) **play Psalm 130 (*Kiviti Adonai*)**. **Note the change in tone (verse 5) musically that transcends language**; and the five Psalms of the Great Doxology (146-150) which form a doxology for the entire Psalter – **play Psalm 150 (*Vashawn Mitchell’s* lyrical adaptation). Powerful emotionally, but not as accurate.**

## Other assorted odds and ends to help you become more at home in the Psalms:

### 1. Differences in Numbering among Heb, Gk, Latin, & English Traditions:

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| a. Hebrew/Eng | LXX/Vulgate                                     |
| 1-8           | 1-8   |
| 9-10          | 9   |
| 11-113        | 10-112  |
| 114-115       | 113   |
| 116           | 114-115   |
| 117-146       | 116-145   |
| 147           | 146-147   |
| 148-150       | 148-150 (LXX adds Ps 151, also found at Qumran) |
- b. English follows Hebrew numbering of whole psalms—psalm titles containing more than two words often numbered as separate verses in Hebrew & Greek—not numbered in English

### 2. Superscriptions (Psalm Titles)

There is a great variety among different versions & even different mss of same version concerning psalm titles—116 psalms have titles in Hebrew—usually a later addition, but most titles probably in place before final redaction of book. Titles contain different types of information:

- association with a particular person or group of persons (authorship, editors?)—73 attributed to David, 2 to Solomon (Pss 72; 127), 1 to Moses (Ps 90), various guilds of temple singers (Korah, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, Ethan)
- supposed historical background to psalm (51)
- liturgical information (tune name, technical terms)
  - Possible song tunes: Gittith (8; 81; 84), Muth-labben, Hind of the Dawn (22), Alamothe (46), Lilies (45; 69; 80; 60: Lily of revelation (?), Mahalath (53; 88), Dove on Far-off Terebinths (56), Do Not Destroy (57; 58; 59; 75)
- type of psalm (e.g., hymn, song)
- shîr—cultic songs (associated with Zion temple), often associated with instrumental music
- mizmor—psalm, singing accompanied by instruments—57 times
- la-maneseah—for the music director—55 times (see also Hab 3:19)
- miktam (Pss 16; 56-60 titles)—psalm of atonement? (Mowinckel)
- maskil—didactic poem, meditation? (Delitzsch)—skillful psalm? (Ewald)
- selah—71 times in Psalms, 3 times in Haggai—associated with relatively older psalms, but usage there may not be as old as psalms themselves—LXX understands it to mean some kind of interlude; most Jewish tradition understands it to mean “forever”; Vulgate (OL) omits it—some scholars take word from root sll, “to lift up,” which might mean to lift up the voice (sing louder), to lift up the eyes (repeat the verse), or to come in with loud music or a choral benediction—others take word from root slh (Aram), “to turn, bend, pray,” indicating the point at which the congregation was to bow down in prayer
- Sheol—from root meaning “to ask,” possibly in ref. to necromancy—refers to place of dead, underworld—described in OT as a place of darkness, where dust covers

everything—only food for inhabitants is dust, & drink is black, murky water—described as city with gates & streets, but one which is silent, where things are forgotten—a pit, place of corruption & decay, where no communion with God is possible—cf. Greek concept of Hades

- l. higgsaion (9:16)—musical flourish? (Mowinckel)
- m. shiggsaion (Ps 7 title)—psalm of lamentation? (Mowinckel)—corruption of higgsaion?
- n. shîr ha-ma<sup>^</sup>aloth—pilgrimage song, processional song (Pss 120-134)
- o. tehillah—song of praise, hymn (Ps 145)
- p. tephillah—prayer of lament, prayer of request (Pss 17; 86; ...; Hab 3)
- q. be-nigînoth—on strings (Pss 4; 6; ...)
- r. al-hanehîlîth—for flute accompaniment (Ps 5)
- s. sheminith—from word meaning “eight,” understood as concerning a lower octave, an eight-string instrument, or the eighth stage of some ritual

### 3. Repetitions and References –

- a. Overlap within the Psalter
  - i. Psalm 14 and 53 are nearly identical (only 14:5b-6 and 53:5b are different)
  - ii. Psalm 31:1-4 parallels Psalm 71:1-3
  - iii. Psalm 40:13-17 is repeated in Psalm 70
  - iv. Psalm 57:8-11 is repeated in Psalm 108:1-5; Psalm 60:5-12 is repeated in Psalm 108:6-12.
  - v. Psalm 136 repeats the line, “his steadfast love endures forever” after every verse. The opening, “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever” opens Psalm 106, 107, and 118 (as well as the closing verse of Psalm 118).
- b. Psalms elsewhere in the Old Testament
- c. Most-quoted book in the NT (Isaiah is next).
- d. Lectionary Interpretive references

### 4. Hebrew Poetry – In the Psalms, ideas rhyme rather than words. (Bono, in Steve Stockman, *Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2*); parallelism

- a. Writing the Sacred seminar exercise – lists, restatement, citation/dialogue, questions, acrostic

### 5. Bibliography

- a. *Chanting the Psalms* by Cynthia Bourgeault
- b. *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* by John D. Witvliet
- c. *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* by Walter Brueggemann
- d. *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* by Walter Brueggemann
- e. *Praying the Psalms* by Thomas Merton
- f. *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- g. *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer & Life in Christ* by J. Todd Billings
- h. *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* by Gordan Wenham

- i. *Psalm-shaped Prayerfulness: A Guide to the Christian Reception of the Psalms* by Margaret M. Daly-Denton
- j. *Forgotten Psalms: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship*, C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste, editors
- k. *A Retreat with the Psalms: Resources for Personal and Communal Prayer* by John C. Endres and Elizabeth Liebert
- l. *Praying with the Body: Bringing the Psalms to Life* by Roy De Leon
- m. *Writing the Sacred: A Psalm-Inspired Path to Appreciating and Writing Sacred Poetry* by Ray McGinnis

## 6. Psalters and Commentaries

- a. *Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship*
- b. *The Emergent Psalter* by Isaac Everett
- c. *The Book of Psalms: Translation and Commentary* by Robert Alter
- d. *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary* by Walter Bruggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr.
- e. *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness* by Nan C. Merrill
- f. *Revised Grail Psalter* by the Benedictine Monks of Conception Abbey
- g. *The (ICEL) Psalter: A faithful and inclusive rendering from the Hebrew into contemporary English poetry, intended primarily for communal song and recitation. This translation is offered for study and for comment by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy – ICEL.*
- h. *The Poets' Book of Psalms: The Complete Psalter as Rendered by Twenty-Five Poets from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* – edited by Laurence Wieder
- i. *The Upper Room Worshipbook* edited with many compositions by Elise Eslinger

## 7. Online References – See [Gordy-Stith.com/Devotions](http://Gordy-Stith.com/Devotions) for working links

- a. Richard's Tehillim – a blog dedicated to the Psalms
- b. Karl Kohlhase's lyrical settings of the 150 Psalms
- c. Vineyard Library – Book of Praise Psalter
- d. Calvin Institute of Christian Worship – Singing More Psalms in Worship
- e. Isaac Everett's Emergent Psalter Podcast
- f. Union University's Psalms Project
- g. Music for the Church of God – Metrical Psalter Collection
- h. Genevan Psalter Resource Center
- i. Russ Stutler's Several Ways to Sing the Psalms
- j. David Clayton's The Way of Beauty – Psalm Tones
- k. ChoralWiki Table of Psalms
- l. Free Church Worship Psalms Song List
- m. The Psalms of David in Metre
- n. The Psalm Project (Dutch) – contemporary Gregorian settings
- o. The Psalms Project (note the S) – a marriage of King David's Psalter with modern worship music