

“I am in Love with You, O God”: A Psalm of Adoration and Praise

Psalm 18:1,19, 28-9

Most scholars think that David wrote Psalm 18 as a young man. He had conquered Goliath with a slingshot and a stone. The giant Goliath had roared: “What, you think me a puppy dog and you have come with a switch? Come and I will feed you to the birds and beasts.” And young David had answered with his own holy trash talk: “You came to me with a sword and spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord. I will slay you and cut off your head.” So, it happened and so everything about David’s young life seemed charmed.

David loves the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul and strength. He would fail his God later in his life, but he had what the text calls “a heart after God’s own heart”, and that is what saved him in the end.

I

David’s joy in God was his strength and his strength was in his joy. As Nehemiah wrote “The joy of the Lord is our strength.” As few ever have, David knew God’s delight in him.

When David, later king, moved the capital to Jerusalem and brought the Ark of the Lord into the city he stripped to his gym shorts and danced before the Lord with all his might. His wife Michal was not pleased; it seemed a bit excessive to her.

So here is Psalm 18:

I love you, Lord, my strength, my rock
my fortress, my savior....

They assailed me in the days of my misfortune
but you, O Lord, were my support.

You brought me out to a broad place;

You delivered me because you delight in me....

You, O Lord, are my lamp,
my God who lightens my darkness.

For by you I can outrun an armed band,
and by my God, I can leap over a wall!

David feeling his oats and God's too.

The psalm begins in David's unabashed love of God: "I am in love with you, O God." Most translations subdue the language: "I love you, O Lord." But the verb here is *rachem*, the word for womb, the word for the deepest heart-love. So,

Samuel Terreo's translation is best: "I am in love with you, Yahweh." Ah, young love for God!

II

When have you felt that kind of love for God? As you sing songs of love for God? That is why the Psalms have from the beginning been the song-book, the prayer-book of the church. And such is why there are love songs to God and Jesus in our hymn books: "Jesus the very thought of Thee"; "Fairest Lord Jesus"; "How Great Thou Art."

Or, when the beauty of God's world overwhelms you and you say with the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay: "O world, I cannot hold thee close enough." Or with Gerard Manley Hopkins: "Glory be to God for dappled things!"

Or when you are in the arms of one you love, or they are in your arms.

Or when you are doing something beautiful or good, or helpful and you feel God's pleasure.

III

Sometimes what we have been taught about God prevents us from loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

John Cobb, a noted American theologian has worked to picture and understand God in ways that let him love God with his whole being, heart, mind, soul and strength. In a recent book, *Jesus' Abba*, he says that the *Abba* of Jesus is a God he can love fully, and that this God is different from the God we have been taught in our religious traditions. *Jesus' Abba* is not the "Almighty God", the Controller of the Universe who dictates everything that happens, for good and ill. *Jesus' Abba* is not the God of the Greek philosophers, the "Unmoved Mover", unmovable and unmoved by what happens on earth or what happens to us.

Jesus' Abba is a God who relinquishes power to be pure love. *Abba* is the God of all love who works at every point with us for our good and the good of the world. Love never coerces; love persuades, woos, draws us to God and to God's dream for the world.

Paul in Romans 8:28 says: "We know that in everything God works with those who love God, who are called according to God's purposes." This is a much better translation than the one many of us grew up with, the 1611 King James Version that goes: "All things work together for good..." We know this is not true. *Jesus' Abba* loves us in weakness, refusing to control all things, but working in love for our good and the good of the world.

I think this is a God we can love with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

Paul Tillich talked about the “God beyond God”, the God beyond our religions and theologies. Sometimes we need to look for a God beyond our current understanding of God. This is true worship.

We love God in different ways. Some hit the world *heart*-first, so love God first with their hearts. Some of us hit the world *brain*-first, and so love God first with their minds. Some of us hit the world *action* first and so love God first with our strength, our bodies in motion. All are forms of the love of God.

The love of God with our minds helps us contemplate, “Why do I love Thee O God?” And it helps us keep clarifying what we believe so we can love God better.

The love of God in action spreads God’s love so all can see God’s love.

The love of God with the heart leads us deeper into the heart of God.

Hymns, songs and anthems can help us love God. Sometimes as we sing those hymns we know almost by heart, it is as if we could put the hymnbook down and sing with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. The words fall away, and we are at one with God, at one in love.

IV

The story is told in Matthew, Mark and Luke, all three, because they didn’t want us to forget it. A scribe came to Jesus, and admiring how Jesus was

answering the questions of other scribes asked, “Which commandment is first of all?” And you have memorized Jesus’ answer:

You shall love the Lord with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your soul and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Most churches I know spend more time focused on the love of neighbor, the second, than on the love of God with all our hearts mind soul and strength.

We focus on God’s love of us—which is the most important thing. But let’s take time to consider our love of God too. Today’s psalm helps us restore the imbalance by focusing on our love of God. Not just our young love of God, but our more mature love of God as we live our lives with God.

There are days which are so right, so beautiful, so full of good, that loving God is as easy as breathing. Praise is our breath. But there are other days so dark, so painful, so baffling that it is hard to *believe* in God, much less *love* God. And yet, in these darkest hours we discover our purest love of God.

Frederick Buechner tells of such a time in his life. His daughter was hovering near death with anorexia. She would get well, but they did not know then that she would. He and his wife traveled 3,000 miles across the country to be with her in the hospital. She weighed less as a young woman than she had as a

child. They visited her every day, played games with her, read to her, stayed by her side. Now here are Buechner's words:

When the worst finally happens, or almost happens, a kind of peace comes. I had passed beyond grief, beyond terror, all but beyond hope, and it was there, in that wilderness, that for the first time in my life I caught sight of something of what it must be like to love God truly.... Though God was nowhere to be clearly seen, nowhere to be clearly heard, I had to be near him—even in the elevator riding up to her floor, even walking down the corridor to the one door among all those doors that had her name taped on it. I loved him because there was nothing else left. I loved him because he seemed to have made himself as helpless in his might as I was in my helplessness. I loved him not so much in spite of there being nothing in it for me but almost because there was nothing in it for me. For the first time in my life, there in that wilderness, I caught a glimpse of what it must be like to love God truly, for his own sake, to love him no matter what. If I loved with less than all my heart, soul, might, I loved him with a least as much of them as I had left for loving anything.... The final secret, I think, is this: that the words “You shall love the Lord your God” become in the end less a command than a promise. And the promise is that, yes, on the

weary feet of faith and the fragile wings of hope, we will come to love him at last as from the first he loved us....

This is God's promise, more than a command: that we *shall* love God that way, that is, not for what God can deliver but for who God is. That is, to love God at last as God has loved us from the first.

I think that David's love grew that way, to a truer, purer love, so he would write over and over again in the Psalms:

O give thanks to the Lord for God is good.

God's steadfast love endures forever.

God's promise is my prayer for me and for us all today.

Amen