

“Love Is Wisdom”

Psalm 111

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I consider myself blessed and fortunate to share another sermon with you. Barbra Brown Taylor says, “A sermon is an act of creation with real risk in it, as one foolhardy human being presumes to address both God and humankind, speaking to each on the other's behalf and praying to get out of the pulpit alive.” So far, I have survived 792 times.

A great way to hear a sermon is to view yourself as an active participant, exploring what God is saying to you, us, and the world along with the preacher. Opening your mind to fresh discoveries, your heart to ever-expanding grace, and your soul to active facets of love. It is helpful to wrestle with sermons, experiment with the ideas, work with the Holy Spirit to embrace the grace, let go of ideas that are not helpful, forget the parts that might lead you astray and pondering the aspects that enhance life. A sermon is a spark, stimulus, catalyst that if wrestled with, will transform you more into the likeness of Jesus.

The psalms are prayers that are used in worship to invite God to change us into a more loving, whole, and joyful person. The psalms that made it into the Bible reveal how the writer encountered God in their highs and lows, triumphs and failures, good fortune and bad breaks. Romano Guardini writes, “Blessed are those who can find God in the rhythm of the mundane: in work and rest, success, joy, in encounters that gladden the heart, but also in occasions for disappointment or sorrow. Blessed are those who can see the Lord in all things!”

The psalmist sings, **Psalm 111 CEV “Shout praises to the Lord! With all my heart. I will thank the Lord when God’s people meet. The Lord has done many wonderful things! Everyone who is pleased with God’s marvelous deeds will keep them in mind. Everything the Lord does is glorious and majestic, and God’s power to bring justice will never end. The Lord God is famous for God’s wonderful deeds, and God is kind and merciful. God gives food to God’s worshipers and always keeps God’s agreement with them. God has shown God’s mighty power to God’s people and has given them the lands of other nations. God is always honest and fair, and God’s laws can be trusted. They are true and right and will stand forever. God rescued God’s people, and God will never break God’s agreement with them. God is awesome and holy. Respect and obey the Lord! This is the first step to wisdom and good sense. God will always be respected.”**

Savor and give thanks for the awe that permeates you as you perceive the wonderful cosmos God has created for you. Soon the landscape will be a glow in the vibrant colors of fall. Marvel at the variety, diverse shapes, and growth of trees. Take a moment to lie under a tree looking up at its branches, feel the grass massage your back, and the wind dance on your skin. Smell the aroma of soil and foliage. Imagine all the happenings the tree has witnessed. Listen to the music of the forest. Take in the colors blue sky, brown branches, colorful leaves. Melt into the spectacular scenery for it is God’s love you message to you.

The church study helps me give thanks to God, because I have surrounded myself with reminders of wonder-filled experiences; majestic mountains, resilient glaciers, inviting lakes, rugged lava, stunning sunrises, vibrant stars, creative trees, delicate snow and hearty sand. There are rocks that remind me of past adventures and call me to keep exploring. The psalmist is inviting you to savor and give thanks for the ways that God’s love is being revealed to you. **Psalm 111:2 NRSV “Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.”**

The cosmos is filled with majestic grandeur, yet God’s finest masterpiece is people. God’s greatest achievement is you. We reveal God’s creative love to each other; from smiles to art, hugs to music, laughter to buildings, listening to meals, compassion to electric wiring, from caring to teaching, from helping to physical therapy, from encouraging to plumbing. You are God’s work of art who reveals God’s creativity, peace, joy, grace, and love. Savor and give thanks for the ways God is revealed in you and others.

God started with nothing and created an ever-growing cosmos. God made you to reveal a unique facet of magnificence. God made you to ever-grow in love and joy. Celebrate God’s wonderful works.

Psalm 111:3 NRSV “God’s righteousness endures forever.” Righteousness is one of God's most innovative projects. Righteousness is being in healthy relationships. A relationship of caring for creation that fills us with wonder. A relationship with God that inspires us to receive and share ever growing love. A relationship with all people that expands our thinking. A relationship with family that encourages us to soar.

Being a righteous person is being in loving relation with God and all people. Whenever you hesitate in loving anyone, you fail to be righteous. Perhaps you are in a legal dispute with someone. The court may find that you are in the right, however if you are not loving the person you disagree with you are not righteous. Thankful God is gracious continually forgiving us for our lack of righteous, that is loving relationships. God continually gives us an endless amount of chances to repent, to turn to loving God, loving all people and loving all of creation.

The psalmist makes it clear, **Psalm 111:3 NRSV “God’s righteousness endures forever.”** God will never stop loving anyone. We are called to follow God’s example.

What makes a good person, a righteous person, is not rule-following, a lucrative career or stuff, rather a good person loves everyone. Of course, none of us can achieve righteousness on our own. We need help, which is why God is within us filling us with love and the ability to forgive through the Holy Spirit.

When one reads the Bible in chronological order and reads Christian history you see a progression of God working to expand humanity’s righteousness, that is helping us be more loving of all people. Our calling is to live the next chapter by expanding humanity’s love.

God is in covenant with us. A covenant is a promise, an agreement. **Psalm 111:5 & 9 NRSV “God is ever mindful of God’s covenant. God has commanded God’s covenant forever.”** The core of God’s covenant is God promises to bless us forever, so we can bless others. God promises to always love us, to be gracious with us, to nurture our forgiveness and love so we can grow to love others. Some people believe that the purpose of our time on earth is to discover how to love everyone. God’s covenant is all inclusive. All families shall be blessed.

Whenever you feel the need to grow your humility or whenever you feel righteous, do a covenant check up on yourself. Are you blessing all people? Are you enhancing every life you encounter? When have you felt like withholding love? When are you hesitate to share? When have you failed to immediately let go of a negative thought? Frederick Buechner said, “The world says, Law and order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, Get and Jesus says, Give.”

The covenant is a promise-based relationship, in which God promises to always love us and we promise to love all people. The good news is that God is always faithful to the covenant, even though we continually waver, lacking love.

God always honors the covenant perfectly. We, however, constantly need to be renewing our side of the covenant. We baptize a person only once because God’s love for each person is steadfast and eternal. We celebrate baptisms in worship to remind everyone of our promise to love God and all people. We regularly celebrate Communion to nourish our relationship with God, so we can nourish our relationships with all people. Weekly we confess our failure to give and receive love, so we can be forgiven and start the week fresh striving to love God, all people, our self and all of creation.

Almost all people know we are to love all people. Life is hard, at times ugly, dark and arduous. Worship helps us let go of the hard, ugly, dark and arduous aspects of life, so we can receive the joy, beauty, light and freedom. Many people who are bitter are stuck in a horrible aspect of their life. We are to love them, help them let go, so they can feel love and in time love God and others. Almost everyone has ways that they try to compensate for their struggle to receive love and share love such as perfectionism, avoidance, rationalization, separation, escapes, justification, vices, addictions. We know we are to love but loving is challenging so we gather for worship, to learn how to love, to be forgiven and learn how to forgive, to be encouraged to love, to help each other love, to do loving actions that grow our feeling of love. We worship to praise God who is love, created a world to love, created us for love and continues to create to enable us to love. We worship to expand our perception of God’s love. God’s love is infinite. We will grow in our perception of God’s love for eternity and still never fully perceive God’s love. We worship to come to really believe that nothing will ever separate us from God’s love, to really believe that all people will be saved, purified and perfected by God’s love.

Love God. Love all people. Love the cosmos. A simple invitation yet extremely complex to do and be. We worship to explore more facets of God’s steadfast, everlasting love so we can be more loving. If you are not

already then try doing this in your relationships. Strive to understand how another loves, experience their loves with them, affirm them of their loving qualities. Then your love for them will grow. One amazing aspect of love is love has endless synergy. The more love we share with another, the more love grows. We discover there is always more dimensions to love and realize that every aspect of love is eternal. The same is true regarding joy. We worship to acknowledge that although our life may be crazy, busy, crummy that we have eternity to discover new loves and joys. I find it exhilarating to know that you and I will delight in ever expanding love and joy for eternity.

There are times when each of us gets stuck unable to receive and share love. God will rescue and renew us. **Psalm 111:9 NRSV “God sends redemption.”** In the ancient world people were confiscated to reconcile a debt, that is they were enslaved. The redeemer was the one who paid the debt for the debtor, buying back what had been confiscated. In a similar manner, prisoners of war are sometimes redeemed by the payment of a ransom. Today a redeemer could be someone who pays off another’s student loans, or mortgage, so they are free to live a simple lifestyle. Throughout scripture and history God’s rescue, deliverance and renewal has taken many different forms. Our ultimate Redeemer is Jesus who frees us from all that diminishes life including the death of our physical body, however our soul essence and all our love and joy is redeemed and given a new perfect, glorious eternal body. God is redeeming every instant that we are unable to receive love and share love. God will never abandon you or leave you stuck and struggling. God is redeeming you. Wisdom is experiencing God’s love and loving. Amen.