

July 25, 2021, Pat Weatherwax, Psalm 145: 10-18, "Everlasting In The Present Tense"

Psalm 145:10-18 NRSV

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.
The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.
 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

INTRODUCTION to Psalm Work

There's at least three ways to talk about Psalms, not my usual yes, no, more, but looking large, mid-size or small. Looking large-we can talk about the Psalms and their type. I've read there are 7 basic types. Some are praise and worship songs- like this one, Psalm 145. Others are not so cheery and confident- like Psalm 22:1 "My God, why have you forsaken me?" That's a Psalm of lament.

We might go mid-sized and talk about this specific psalm. It's really an acrostic poem. Do you know what that is? It's written with each line beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew Aleph-Bet. It's like if we tried to write a poem about God using A to Z, God is always just; God is always benevolent. God shows us compassion. That's a bit constricting, but a good practice in word-smithing. Thankfully there's nothing like x in the Hebrew. "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways"? Or in this case: How marvelous is God? Let me spell it out for you, literally.

I'm opting to go small, very small. Two words from one verse, verse 17. *Tzedek and Hese*d small. Small words. Big concepts. These are two common Hebrew words. I'm definitely NOT very strong in my Hebrew studies, but these two words are the basis of a lot of our worship language. So I want to think about 145:17

**"The LORD is just (TZEDEK) in all his ways,
and kind (HESED) in all his doings."**

Of course those aren't small topics at all. They're single words but huge concepts. Before I got into this theology stuff I lived in a rather black and white framework. God makes you think about things from not either or, but from my favorite framework: Yes, no, and more. So, whatever we are using human words to describe and discuss God, we must take care not to be too simplistic. No thing we say about God is complete with our human language. There are affirmations and there are limitations and hopefully an awareness that with God there's always more that we can express.

You've heard it said there's two sides to every story. But I say there's three: A yes side. A no side. And the biggest awareness that there's always more.... As pastor bud said about marital counseling, there's his side, her side and the truth. There is always more going on than meets the eye, right? So, yes, no and then more.

Now, I've been to some Christian events where there's a bit of warm-up cheering. I think some of you have heard it, and know it too. I'm going to say something and if you know the reply you are supposed to make, help me. Like if I say, on Easter: "Christ is Risen", you respond: "He is risen, indeed!" Ok, like that. Help me, work with me, if you can.

GOD IS GOOD. (ALL THE TIME!)

ALL THE TIME (GOD IS GOOD!)

So what about that? Is God always *Tsedek*? Is God always just and righteous?

Is God always *Hesed*: loving and kind?

As people who have encountered God, ones who are trying to be in a relationship with God, we can affirm "God is good, all the time", yes, with faith and trust.

(YES)

145:17 The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

Eugene Peterson, prolific theologian and writer explains "The Psalms are acts of obedience, answering the God who has addressed us." We are being obedient to God when we affirm that yes, God is just and kind.

God tells us, teaches us in the scriptures, like these words in this Psalm, that God is the holy reigning one who cares. The holy reigning one (so therefore just and right) who cares (is loving and kind).

When possible it's good to see the phrase "the reign of God", as opposed to his kingdom. First it implies Lordship, an especially *just and kind* God is in charge. This, versus a king, a monarch who often is not known to be *just nor kind*.

Do we see that? God isn't only right all the time. God is right all the time AND is kind to us, at the same time.

"The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings."

The LORD is. Not us, but God. We are inclined to be just without being kind or kind without being just. It's a difficult balance, a holy perfect balance of both. We're inclined to be neither, and only rarely both.

Childlike trust helps us. We wouldn't be here today, probably, if we had decided that there is a God, but God isn't just or kind. Even when it's hard to live with our chronic sense that **life** isn't just or kind, faith tells us that God is. Right?

(NO)

"The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings."

I doubt anyone here believes this honestly, all the time. I certainly haven't. Is it **just** when a tornado, tsunami or earthquake, they're called by insurance companies acts of God, when they strike? When a child walks in front of a car, or is shot accidentally? When a beloved daughter is overwhelmed by depression? When earthly struggles happen, is it because God is just?

When innocent people suffer, is it because God is kind? Again remember I, we can only respond as humans, with all the emotions and attitudes God has given us. In **my humble sinful** ?? opinion, no, God doesn't get it right sometimes. It seems that way, but God has to deal with human free will. Our choices, our mistakes, our behavior. Our viewpoint, that's usually 2 sided, not three. There was a fatal car accident by my house last Sunday. A father of three was killed by a drunk driver. That's not God's will. But why didn't God stop it from happening?

So, usually if that cheer thing happens I opt out. Or I prefer to say it the way its makes

more sense to me:

God is God! All the time!

All the time God is God.

God is God and I am not.

What is good? It's a human perspective, only. God's ways are higher- what do these words, just and kind, mean from God's perspective? Of course, saying no God isn't just, isn't kind, the NO, comes from our human frame of reference. If we're honest we have to admit our feeling. Eugene Peterson wrote

We don't always like what God speaks to us, and we don't always understand it. Left to ourselves we will pray to some god who speaks what we like hearing, or to the part of God that we manage to understand." (Answering God, The Psalms as Tools for Prayer; pg 5)

(MORE)

145:17 The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

Consider this; consider how much more *everything* God is than than us

1. Justice without kindness is harsh
2. Kindness without justice is false
3. In everything "God's ways are higher than our ways".

I love the way Frederick Buechner wrote it:

"God has a plan for us, to be sure, but he leaves us in the dark as to what that plan is, and if God's plan happens to conflict with some plans of our own, guess whose way wins out?" (Beyond Words, pg 216)

There's great mystery involved with God's justice and love. The mystery is everlasting, in the present tense. Mysteriously more than we can know, describes God. There's a song I love, that I connect with a family I care about that has had more than their share of tragedy. My friend Wendy sang this. She recently died of ovarian cancer, she had said: "Pat beat it, I can." I did. She didn't. God's ways are higher than our ways.

Babbie Mason sang:

All things work for our good
 Though sometimes we don't see
 How they could
 Struggles that break our hearts in two
 Sometimes blind us to the truth
 Our Father knows what's best for us
 His ways are not our own
 So when your pathway grows dim
 And you just don't see Him,
 Remember you're never alone
 God is too wise to be mistaken
 God is too good to be unkind
 So when you don't understand
 When don't see His plan

When you can't trace His hand
Trust His Heart (CCLI# 637582)

I struggled this week trying to figure out how to explain to you that God is more than just and more kind. I realized I couldn't convince you. You have to figure it out for yourself. But I can tell you a story I told you first in June of 2009, in one of my first sermons on this chancel. It's my significant spiritual event, one of the few times I believe God spoke directly into my heart. It's when I figured it out.

It was 37 years ago, I was working in the operating room late one afternoon. A gynecologist called and needed to bring a toddler to us. She came, bound tightly to an EMS backboard, to protect her from trying to remove the wire hook she had been assaulted with. She was whimpering, and resembled my own curly haired toddler, who like this little girl, was supposedly safely with a babysitter. I realized with dread- when your child is out of your sight you just don't know what is really happening.

We got her off to sleep and easily took care of the offense. And fortunately no serious internal physical injury had occurred.

Then it was the end of my shift and I was released to go home. Often that's a busy time in the locker room, but that day I was surprisingly alone, and alone with my thoughts. I walked out the big employee parking lot to my car, got in and started to drive. And sob, in frustration about how unfair and cruel life is.

I don't know if it was an audible prayer but I did pray, a prayer of lament:
"God, Don't you care what happens down here?"

I can still hear it, in my head or heart, the response. I think it was the Holy Spirit who said: *Jesus is crying, too.*

That changed my life and my faith.

James Loder, a theologian who had a similar experience-one when he was startled by a personal sense of God's love, says the "convictional experience is a breakthrough from the future even as it is a transformation of the past." That's how I feel about that brief moment. God took the pain of my past experiences and convinced me that, yes, God did care.

Because of Jesus we know God cares. God is just. God is kind. I can't teach you that. It's a personal decision. For me, Jesus took the doubt and pain of the past, so I could serve in the future, and that's here and now. God's justice and kindness are "Everlasting in the Present Tense".

God's justice and kindness are not for you to decide if they exist, but the decision you make, your response, is. For me, hopefully for us, it's deciding to say "My Lord, and my God! You are just and kind in all your ways."

I conclude with a prayer from Romans 15:13

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen