

“Saints and Psalms”

Preached by Carolyn Bohler
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“The primary work of the **prophet** is to interfere.”¹ These are the words of Matthew Fox. “The primary work of the prophet is to interfere.” A prophet—whether Isaiah, Jesus, or Martin Luther King, Jr., sees the very big picture—from the perspective of the community or the world. The prophet names what is, what he or she sees happening. If what is happening is good, the prophet says, “Good for you!” More often, if the prophet sees that what is happening is hurting people, the prophet announces: “Do something differently!” The primary work of the prophet is to interfere.

The vocation of a **saint**, says Matthew Fox, is to be a “Sweet Strong Lover,”² a “Sweet Strong Lover.”

The Roman Catholic Church names saints and celebrates saints’ days. We mostly hear of St. Nicholas and St. Patrick, but there is saint associated with each day of the year. There is quite a process to go through to become a saint.

We Protestants are very bold when it comes to designating saints. We declare that everyone is a saint, at least we all can be. **The saint loves God, loves all others, and loves self.** We are all saints as we seek to be Sweet, Strong Lovers.

A word that is often associated with “saint,” especially when I say we are all saints, is “sinner.” We are both “saint,” and “sinner.” That is, we all fall short. It’s true, no matter how sweetly and strongly we love God, others and self, we can always love so much stronger—in all directions.

I find myself associating *saints with psalms*. People who wrote the psalms that are included in the Hebrew Bible were wrestling with very human issues, with human dilemmas, and they put their genuine honest reflections into words. They sought to love life, to understand their circumstances, and to think about God in relation to all that. The words of the psalms with which we are familiar were really lyrics to songs. The Psalmists were lyricists.

Song writers today also wrestle with very human issues, with human dilemmas, and our songs today still express genuine yearnings and emotions. Don’t lyricists write words which are the longings of their hearts? I think those who poured their hearts out to God as they created the psalms in our Bible were striving to become sweet strong lovers. I invite you all to write a psalm of your own, expressing your genuine yearnings to God.

What was on the psalmists’ hearts and minds and what is on our heart and mind as they and we struggle with life’s hardships and rejoice in life’s richness?

As we read Psalm 81 and sing the response, hear one **theme** of the psalms—that is, **singing with joy, singing to God with joy.**

[PSALTER led by Karen p. 803...]

Listen to other themes of the psalms:

Deep gratitude to God and **contentment, as in the familiar Shepherd Psalm**

[Ps. 23:5-6 “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. . .”]

Listen to the themes of the psalms:

Psalms name feelings of **loneliness** yet usually conclude that however much we *feel* alone, we are always **known by God. In Psalm 30, Sadness and longing** reach its depth, then the one who is sad lets go ...

[“Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”³]

The lyricists from the Bible expressed joy; they told of their contentment and gratitude as well as their sadness and longing. Amidst all these human experiences, they acted as theologians, trying to figure out how God related to them.

We’ll sing a song now by John Wesley, who put together the words of the ancient lyricists:

[Hymn: GIVE TO THE WINDS THY FEARS 129, 1,2,4]

The hymn we just sang expresses the psalmists’ most frequent conclusion to how we relate to God... that **God offers strength--as in Psalm 46.**

[“God is our refuge and strength . . . ⁴ a very present help in trouble...”⁵-ps. 46:1]

However much we trust that God is our strength and will help us, we, like the ancient ones who were sweet strong lovers, implore of God, “Please tell us what to do.”

[Hymn: LEAD ME LORD 473]

There are plenty more themes in the psalms, such as excitement with creativity in life. My mother used to express her excitement in life and her creative abilities when she completed sewing a garment. It’s similar to a teenager or college student who finishes a term paper. Listen to the psalmist’s excitement:

[Come and see...Come and see...” 66]

The lyricists of old did not always have kind feelings toward everyone else. Just like us today, they wrestled with how fairness entered into the Divine equation as God provided for all.

[“Do not fret over those who prosper in their way.”⁶ 37:7]

*We have listened to themes of joy, gratitude, contentment, sadness, longing, trust in God’s strength, excitement with life itself, and wrestling with unfairness. Basically all of the psalms seek **Right-relationship with the past-the present-and-the-future:***

[“Though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for [God] holds us by the hand.”⁷ 37:24]

Notice all the “You’d” and “me’s.” in the psalms. (“You” have searched “me.”) Many psalms are **intimate love notes between humans and God.**

Today we recognize all sorts of Saints⁸: those who have died this past year and those whom we cherish over decades, even centuries. We also claim, boldly, that we are saints, because we strive to be **sweet, strong lovers**—of God, of others, of self.

Those who claim psychological knowledge and those with an understanding of spirituality observe that we are freer to love others if we have faced the depths of our own souls. I think that is largely because all of us have so much in common. I can love you more deeply once I am able to accept all of who I am. I’m able to then you for who you are. Meanwhile, God, who knows the depths of both of us, is the Strongest Lover of all, singing sweetly and serenely to our souls.

¹ Matthew Fox, oral presentation Caring for Creation conference, October 2006

² Ibid.

³ Psalm 30:5

⁴ Leads Martin Luther to A mighty fortress is our God...

⁵ Psalm 46:10

⁶ Psalm 37:7

⁷ Psalm 37:24

⁸ Paul greets churches in Rome, Corinth, and Philippi and addresses his letter to “the saints” or “those called to be saints” ...Latin Sanctus and Paul’s Greek word hagios is “set apart”...