

In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

Psalm 139:16b

The Laughter of Grace

We are in the middle of the Lenten season. As I have mentioned, there are many different ways to understand and practice Lent, but personally, I tend to use Lent as a season of reflection on who God is, and how are we to respond. Perhaps this is the greatest proof of my Presbyterian theological roots, as John Calvin began his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with the following premise:

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom,
consists in two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

Psalm 139 (or at least most of it) is a favorite reflection on who we are as creatures of a loving God, known by our Creator beyond any of our attempts to escape or hide the truth of our lives. But I was reminded yesterday that there are opportunities to witness the great tapestry of our lives, and the great love of God in weaving together the strands of that tapestry.

Tiffany Ashworth was ordained a minister of the Word and Sacrament yesterday, in a lovely worship service hosted by Knox Presbyterian Church in Pasadena. Before she gave the benediction, Tiffany shared eloquently how she sees God's love throughout her life embodied in the people witnessing her ordination, people who have known her at different times of her life, representing a variety of backgrounds and faith traditions. (She said it beautifully, but I didn't record it so I apologize now for my clumsy paraphrase.) I pray that each of us gets to see the panorama of God's love in our lives.

Our Lenten reflections tend to focus on our broken, sinful, mortal nature (as, of course, Calvin did). But the full story of Christ's sacrifice tells us that depraved as we are, God yet loves us so much as to die for our sake. After all, we are the very product of God's intricate creative craft. As the Psalmist sings,

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

Psalm 139:13-14

Indeed, in spite of our failings and the tragedy that surrounds us in this old world, we are reminded that there is no sin, no brokenness, that is greater than the power of God's grace to save us. This, I believe, is another clumsy paraphrase, this time of Karl Barth. A quote that is often ascribed to Barth is "Laughter is the closest thing to the grace of God." Which reminds me of the author John Updike, grandson of a Presbyterian minister, who described his happy childhood of faith: "My parents were inclined to laugh a lot and to examine everything for the fingerprints of God."

While we would surely deceive ourselves if we say we have no sin (*1 John 1:8*), we discount the glory of God's grace if we surrender to despair. We also miss the point of our lives if we simply revel in the saving grace of God and fail to share God's love with others. Let me share one more quote, from Irenaeus of Lyons: "The glory of God is a living person, and the life of each living person is the vision of God."

As we look honestly at our need for redemption, may we do so with the confidence in a saving God. And may we heed God's call to join in the band of the redeemed to share the good news with others.

Peace,

