

GRATITUDE – PSALM 34

”What day is it?” asked Winnie the Pooh.

“It’s today,” squeaked Piglet.

“My favorite day,” said Pooh.

Is today your favorite day? (BTW, I recommend the movie “Christopher Robin”, with Christopher Robin now an adult.)

“I will bless God at all times;” said the Psalmist, in today’s psalm. Bless God -- today, and every day. This is the day, today is the day that God has made.

I love the Psalms. They’re the hymns used in the worship services of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. They’re very old. Jesus knew the Psalms well, he was nurtured on them, and he quoted them frequently.

And they’re still fresh, even though they’re about 2500 years old – they still speak to us, right where we are, in all the joys and sorrows of our very human lives.

The Psalms are a treasure chest of devotion. Most of the Old and New Testaments was written by the theological giants like Paul Tillich – prophets like Amos and Isaiah; disciples like Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; brilliant minds like St. Paul. All typical occupants of stained glass windows. The Psalms are the hymnal of the common person in the pew, written by and for ordinary people like you and me.

And they speak to us – in every season of our life the Psalms capture what we’re thinking or feeling. There are psalms for depressed people, happy people, discouraged people, grateful people, grieving people. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve picked up a Prayer Book, opened randomly to a psalm, and been fed by it. There is something in the Psalms for anyone in any situation. I recommend reading one every day.

Today’s psalm, for instance. Psalm 34 – The author of the psalm says, “I will bless God at all times.” Really? At all times? Why?

Because, as the Psalmist says, “I sought, and God answered me. ...I called in my affliction and God heard me.”

Apparently the author of this psalm had been in some kind of bad situation – family or job problems, sickness, depression, distress at what was going on in the world, problems at the local synagogue.

And the author of the psalm got an answer. “God heard me and saved me from all my troubles.” So he sang, “Taste and see that God is good; happy are they who trust in the Most High!”

The trials and tribulations of the human situation haven’t changed all that much in 2500 years, from the time of smoke signals to Instagram, from foot traffic to space travel. They had their corrupt politics, their life’s problems, so the Psalmist says, I called upon God, and God heard me and delivered me out of all my terror. And then in gratitude he sings, God is good – “O taste and see that God is good.”

The same with us. In spite of our problems du jour, 2500 years later, we too have evidence that God is good. And we can experience this good God with our senses – “O taste and see.”

I remember a time a few years back, Ann and I were on the island of Iona, a sacred place off the SW coast of Scotland. I was sitting by myself in an old churchyard, feeling generally down and discouraged over some bad stuff I’d been going through, certainly not feeling grateful for much, when a bird came and sat on a tree branch above me, and started to sing. It sang and it sang, it must have been for 20 or 30 minutes, although I lost all track of time -- the most beautiful bird song I’d ever heard. And I knew that bird was singing to me – “taste and see that God is good.” I heard the voice of God in that bird.

As my heart filled with gratitude, with the Psalmist I was able to say, “I sought, and God answered me, ...I called in my affliction, and God heard me.” “Taste and see the goodness of God.”

When things go badly for us, as they will -- in our relationships, our jobs, our health, our country, with all the talk of politics and refugees and global warming, even with the Giants struggling to stay above .500 – it’s easy to feel that God has abandoned us.

But God never promised us that everything would be easy and that we’d never have any troubles. What God did promise, in the Psalms and throughout Scripture, was to be with us,

always, whatever befalls us. It's right there at the very end of St. Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus says, "Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." So give thanks!

I remember a parishioner in Hawaii, a 95-year-old woman with one of those wonderful wrinkled faces from too many smiles and too much time in the sun, who had a whole host of problems with her family and with her body. I went to see her one day, as I liked to do, and she was out working in her tiny garden. "Alexandra," I said, "how are you?" She looked up at me with her Grannie Apple face all smiles and replied, "I'm thankful." "I'm thankful." And she was. She had so many things she could have complained about, so many aches and pains and troubles and body parts that didn't work, but like Winnie the Pooh the gift of each new day left her nothing but grateful. And her attitude was contagious – I was on cloud nine for the rest of the day, and so grateful for what she had given me. Whatever problems I had that day seemed suddenly small and insignificant. "Taste and see that God is good,"

The poet Wendell Berry once said "Be joyful even though you have considered all the facts." Be joyful that you're alive for another day, be joyful for the gift of life and love and the beauty of God's creation. And you're in it! You're still in it! Go tell or show someone. Be grateful for the presence of God – in everything.

"Taste and see that God is good." It's not just an empty pie-in-the-sky hope, but there's evidence, evidence from our five senses – "Taste and see that God is good."

It's right there in front of your eyes – God is with us, love is with us – Jesus is the bread of life that feeds us -- happy are they who trust in him! (and there's an exclamation point at the end of that sentence) "happy are they who trust in God!"

Rachel Carson, who really ushered in the environmental movement with her crusading book Silent Spring, describes introducing her young nephew to the woods and waters of her home on the coast of Maine. Carson writes, "If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength."

Look around you, open your hearts, taste and see and hear and smell that God is good.

With that great theologian Winnie the Pooh say, “Today is my favorite day.” Today is a gift from God. Jesus is the bread of life, “O taste and see that God is good; happy are they who trust in God!”