



PRAYING THE PSALMS & PROVERBS

Bible Jam Session 3 – Winter/Spring



NOTE:

Our Next Class is February 22, 2022
We will be on break on February 15, 2022

FEBRUARY 8, 2022
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Section A: Praying the Psalms, by Walter Bruggemann
St. Mary's Press, Winona, MN; 1984

Thanks to Judie Jayne for sharing this book by theologian Walter Bruggemann. His book complements the studies we have been conducting on the Psalms over the last two weeks. If you are interested, the text can be found online for less than \$10.00.

The framework of Praying the Psalms is constructed around five chapters:

1. Letting Experience Touch the Psalter
 - a. "...the psalms of the Old Testament offer a ... presentation of how it is with all sorts and conditions of [humanity]. The Psalms, with few exceptions are not the voice of God addressing us. They are rather the voice of our own common humanity—gathered over a long period of time, but a voice that continues to have amazing authenticity and contemporaneity. It speaks about life the way it really is, for in those deeply human dimensions the same issues and possibilities persist. And so, when we turn to the Psalms it means we enter into the middle of that voice of humanity and decide to take our stand with that voice. We are prepared to speak among them and with them and for them, to express our solidarity in his anguished, joyous human pilgrimage. We add a voice to the common elation, shared grief, and communal rage that besets us all.
 - b. *In the Rawness of Life*: "Recently there has been considerable discussion of those events which drive us to the edge of humanness and make us peculiarly open to the Holy One. This investigation, pertinent to our theme, is undertaken because many persons conclude that the 'religious dimension' of their life is void. And so there is an asking about those elements in our life that relate to the 'hunger for transcendence.' in a variety of ways, it is suggested that the events at the edge of our humanity, i.e., the ones that threaten and disrupt our convenient equilibrium, are the events which may fill us with passion and evoke in us eloquence. Thus the psalms mostly reflect such events of passion and eloquence when we are pressed by experience to address the Holy One."

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2. The Liberation of Language

- a. “Praying the Psalms depends on two things: (1) *what we find* when we come to the Psalms that is already there and (2) *what we bring* to the Psalms out of our lives.
- b. The work of prayer is to bring these two realities together—the boldness of the Psalms and the extremity of our experience—to let them interact, play with each other, tease each other, and illuminate each other. The work of prayer consists in the imaginative use of language to give the extremities their full due and to force new awareness and new realities by the boldness of our speech. All this is to submit to the Holy One in order that we may be addressed by a Word that outdistances all our speech.
- c. Psalms of Lament...engage in enormous hyperbole:

I am poured out like water,
all my bones are out of joint,
my heart is like wax...
my strength is dried up like a potsherd (22:14-15)

I lie in the midst of lions (57:4).
- d. The function of such lament speech is to create a situation that did not exist before the speech, to create an external event that matches the internal sensitivities.

3. Language Appropriate to a Place

- a. Being attentive to language means cultivating the candid imagination to bring our experience to the Psalms and permitting it to be disciplined by the speech of the Psalms.
- b. The notion about liberation of language is not only about *free speech*, but about *speech freeing us*. Thus, we may become aware that when speech is broken free from a need for exactitude and permitted to reshape our existence and experience, we will experience new

freedom that is not just freedom of speech, but freedom for faith.

- c. The *pit v. the wings*: it is clear that the Psalms, when we freely engage ourselves with them, are indeed subversive literature. They break things loose. They disrupt and question. Most of all they give us new eyes to see and new tongues to speak. And therefore, we need not enter the presence of the Holy One mute and immobilized. We go there to practice our vocation of receiving the new future God is speaking to us. To risk such prayer is to repent of the old orientation to which we no longer belong. It is to refuse the pit which must first be fully experienced for the sake of the wings which may be boldly anticipated.

4. Christians in “Jewish Territory”

- a. The Psalms are a centerpiece of Christian liturgy, piety and spirituality. They have been so from the beginning of the Christian movement for good reason. They have been found poignant in expression, able to empower *believing imagination* [my emphasis] in remarkable ways. (For example, in the passion of Jesus.)
- b. But the use of the Psalms by Christians is not without awkwardness, for the Psalms are relentlessly Jewish in their mode of expression and in their faith claims. And with our best intent for generosity and good faith, the different nuances of Jewish and Christian faith are not to be overlooked or easily accommodated.
- c. ... a long-standing practice (going back to very early Christian interpretation) is to treat the Psalms as claims about Jesus Christ. In the tradition of Augustine, for example, there is a tendency to find hints about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus at many points in the Psalms.

It is not easy to know how to assess such a practice. On the one hand, it may seem to make the Psalms more readily available for Christian use. On the other hand, I suggest such “spiritualizing” tends to tone the Psalms down and avoid abrasive and offensive elements. On balance, I believe it more helpful to avoid such a practice. We will be helped to a more genuine piety and an authentic faith if we engage

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the Psalms as poetry about our common, particular humanness. Nothing should be done which detracts from that reality. Facing such a “Christian” alternative, we should be more attentive to the rawness of Jewish faith out of which the Psalms speak.

But there is another alternative. It is in the prayers of Jesus that we may link Jewish ways of praying and christological interpretation. For the prayers of Jesus are surely prayers of a Jew. He prayed as a Jew. And the entire tradition of Christian prayer and Christian use of the Psalms must be seen in this light. This gives us warrant for Christological interpretation, but the centrality of Jesus can never be far separated from the Jewish character of the material.

We are now, especially because of the holocaust, at a new place in Jewish-Christian conversations. Old presuppositions and behaviors will no longer do. We are at a new place where we must take each other with a new kind of seriousness, albeit with a new kind of awkwardness.

- d. To pray with Jews means to live with them in the hope and danger of *real judgment*. There is no doubt in the Psalter that God takes folks seriously. On the one hand, God takes folks seriously and lets us have what we choose. But on the other hand the arena for our spirituality is this: Jews know that this God who honors our ways is the same God who overrides our ways. This tension lies at the heart of spirituality in the Psalms. The tension is that God gives us permission to choose our futures, and, at the same time, God chooses a future for us that is gracious beyond our choosing. This tension must be lived with and not resolved.

The Jewish awkwardness with which we must contend concerns a *special history* as the elect ones, a *special claim* in the Torah which assumes and compels, and a *special awe* before the reality of God’s judgment and mercy. To *pray with Jews* means to stay as long as these poems do at the raw edge with a live God who will not let us settle easily for too long. There is a precariousness in this life of faith. Such prayer is risky because “we have to do here”[sic] with a live God who is [Godself] precarious and at risk. And the gift of the Jews in this

literature is that we may be engaged with this very same God.

5. Vengeance—Human and Divine

- a. The Psalms explore the full gamut of human experience from rage to hope. Indeed, it would be very strange if such a robust spirituality lacked a dimension of vengeance, for we would conclude for just at the crucial point, robustness had turned to cowardice and propriety. The vitality of the Psalms, if without a hunger for vengeance, would be a cop-out. [...] the expression of vengeance is not unnatural, unexpected, or inappropriate. But that in on way diminishes its problematic character.
- b. The Psalms are the rhetorical practice in fullest meaning of *what is in us*.
- c. For those who are troubled about the Psalms of vengeance, there is a way beyond them. But it is not an easy or “natural way.” It is not the way of careless religious goodwill. It is not the way of moral indifference or flippancy. It is, rather, the way of crucifixion, of accepting the rage and grief and terror of evil in ourselves in order to be liberated for compassion toward others. In the gospel, Christians know “a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12: 31). But it is not the first way. My hunch is that there is a way *beyond* the psalms of vengeance, but it is a way *through* them and not *around* them. And that is so because of what in fact goes on with us. Willy-nilly, we are vengeful creatures. Thus these harsh Psalms must be fully embraced as our own. Our rage and indignation must be fully *owned* and fully *expressed*. And then (only then) can our rage and indignation be *yielded* to the mercy of God. In taking this route through them, we take the route God [Godself] has gone. We are not permitted a cheaper, easier, more “enlightened” way.

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Section B: Psalm 51 – The Miserere (“Miserere mei, Deus”)

A psalm of David – Written when the prophet Nathan came to him after David’s affair with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12

- ¹ O God, have mercy on me!
Because of your love and great compassion,
wipe away my faults;
- ² wash me clean of my guilt; purify me of my sin.
- ³ For I am aware of my faults,
and have my sin constantly in mind.
- ⁴ I sinned against you alone, and did what is evil in your sight.
You are just when you pass sentence on me,
blameless when you give judgment.
- ⁵ I was born in sin, conceived in sin—
- ⁶ yet you want truth to live in my innermost being.
Teach me your wisdom!
- ⁷ Purify me with *hyssop* until I am clean;
wash me until I am purer than new-fallen snow.
- ⁸ Instill some joy and gladness into me;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice again.
- ⁹ Turn your face from my sins, and wipe out all my guilt.
- ¹⁰ O God, create a clean heart in me,
put into me a new and steadfast spirit;
- ¹¹ do not banish me from your presence,
do not deprive me of your Holy Spirit!
- ¹² Be my savior again, renew my joy,
keep my spirit steady and willing;
- ¹³ and I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
- ¹⁴ Save me from bloodshed, O God, of my salvation—

- and my tongue will acclaim your justice.
- ¹⁵ Open my lips, YHWH, and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ Sacrifice gives you no pleasure;
were I to present a burnt offering, you would not have it.
- ¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
you will not scorn this crushed and broken heart.
- ¹⁸ Make Zion prosper through your favor,
and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹ There will be proper sacrifice to please you—
burn offerings and who oblations,
and young bulls to be offered on your altar.
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It is said:

“This piece was regarded by the Vatican as one of the most “holy/useful” musical pieces they possessed in their library. So much so that for centuries they guarded the piece and did not allow anyone to copy the manuscript. They were not prepared, however, for a special visit in 1770 from a 14 year old named Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who, on a trip to Rome with his father, heard the piece twice and transcribed it faithfully from memory, creating the first known unauthorized copy.”

The Miserere, Deus

Miserere (full title: *Miserere mei, Deus*, Latin for "Have mercy on me, O God") is a setting of Psalm 50 (Psalm 51 in Protestant Bibles) by Italian composer Gregorio Allegri. It was composed during the reign of Pope Urban VIII, probably during the 1630s, for the exclusive use of the Sistine Chapel during the Tenebrae services of Holy Week, and its mystique was increased by unwritten performance traditions and ornamentation. It is written for two choirs, of five and four voices respectively, singing alternately and joining to sing the ending in 9-part polyphony.

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Video – Choir of New College, Oxford

https://youtu.be/36Y_ztEW1NE

Miserere mei, Deus: secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.

Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam.

Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea: et a peccato meo munda me.

Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco: et peccatum meum contra me est semper.

Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci: ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis, et vincas cum judicaris.

Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum: et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.

Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti: incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi.

Asperges me hysopo, et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor.

Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam: et exsultabunt ossa humiliata.

Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis: et omnes iniquitates meas dele.

Cor mundum crea in me, Deus: et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.

Ne proicias me a facie tua: et spiritum sanctum tuum ne auferas a me.

Redde mihi laetitiam salutaris tui: et spiritu principali confirma me.

Docebo iniquos vias tuas: et impii ad te convertentur.

Libera me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis meae: et exsultabit lingua mea justitiam tuam.

Domine, labia mea aperies: et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam.

Quoniam si voluisses sacrificium, dedissem utique: holocaustis non delectaberis.

Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus: cor contritum, et humiliatum, Deus, non despicias.

Benigne fac, Domine, in bona voluntate tua Sion: ut aedificentur muri Ierusalem.

Tunc acceptabis sacrificium iustitiae, oblationes, et holocausta: tunc imponent super altare tuum vitulos.

<u>Alef</u>	<u>Bet</u>	<u>Gimel</u>	<u>Dalet</u>	<u>He</u>	<u>Waw/Vav</u>	<u>Zayin</u>	<u>Chet</u>	<u>Tet</u>	<u>Yod</u>	<u>Kaf</u>
א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ
										ך
<u>Lamed</u>	<u>Mem</u>	<u>Nun</u>	<u>Samech</u>	<u>Ayin</u>	<u>Pe</u>	<u>Tsadi</u>	<u>Qof</u>	<u>Resh</u>	<u>Shin</u>	<u>Tav</u>
ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת
	ם	ן			ף	ץ				

Α α Β β Γ γ Δ δ Ε ε Ζ ζ
Alpha Beta Gamma Delta Epsilon Zeta

Η η Θ θ Ι ι Κ κ Λ λ Μ μ
Eta Theta Iota Kappa Lambda Mu

Ν ν Ξ ξ Ο ο Π π Ρ ρ Σ σ ς
Nu Xi Omicron Pi Rho Sigma

Τ τ Υ υ Φ φ Χ χ Ψ ψ Ω ω
Tau Upsilon Phi Chi Psi Omega
